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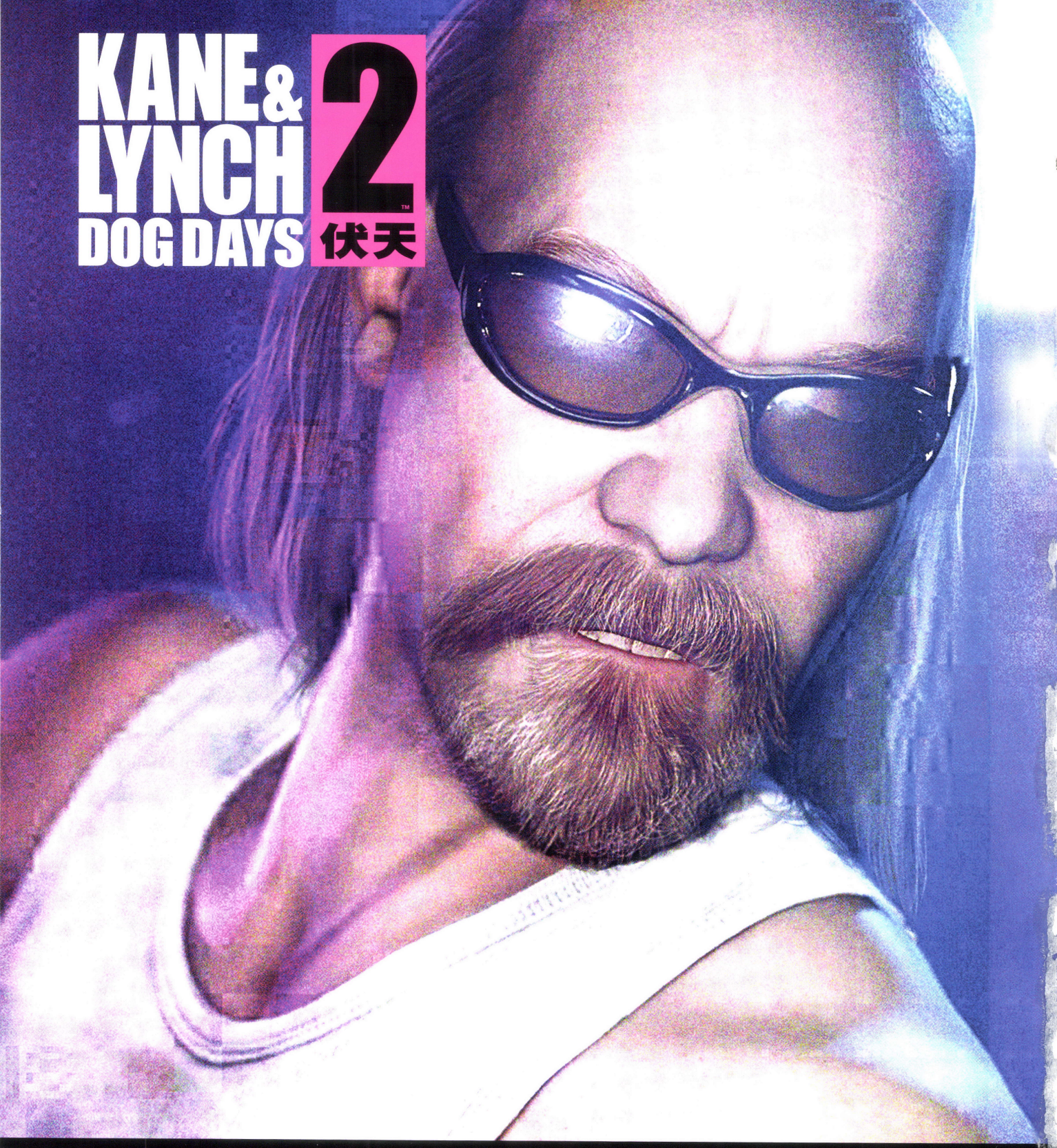

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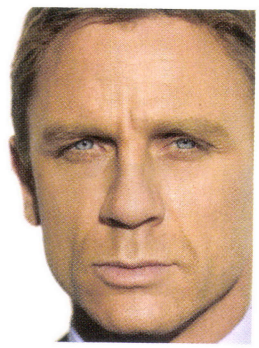

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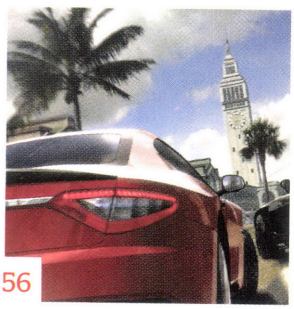

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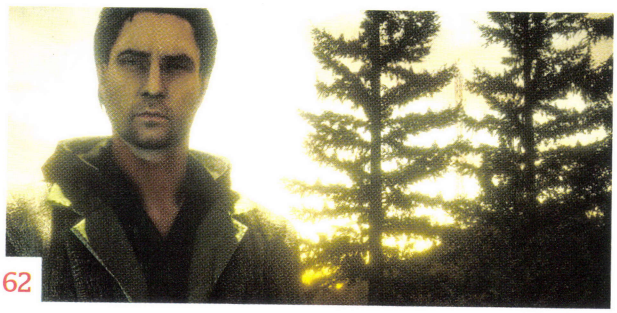

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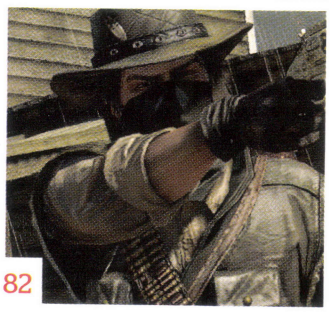

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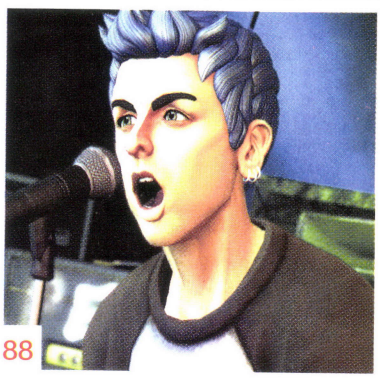

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We'd like to

Thank

1 / **Julian Murdoch** takes us on a tour of MMO developer Turbine and describes how their new free-to-play model is thriving. He's been writing about video games for the past 5 years. You can find him at GamersWithJobs.com as well as cohosting the site's Conference Call and the ThreeMovesAhead strategy-gaming podcasts. His most recent piece for *GamePro* was "Gaming the Score," which focused on Metacritic.

2 / **Andrew Groen** examines the science behind 3D gaming. He is a full-time freelancer who has written for many video-game publications, including *GamePro*, GamesRadar.com, and Joystiq.com. He wrote "The Psychology of Fanboyism" in the July 2010 issue.

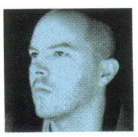
3 / **Joe Rybicki** of the blog Plastic Axe writes a regular column on music games and for *GamePro*. This month, Rybicki suggests that makers of band-specific games should follow a set of basic guidelines. Rybicki has written about games for 13 years.

4 / **Andrew Pfister** knows fear. He just doesn't find it in video games. He theorizes that games lack a "fear factor" because they give you something no other medium does. Pfister is the senior games editor of G4tv.com and the producer of the weekly webshow Feedback.

5 / **Joe Donato** is this month's contributor from the Bitmob.com online community. Each month *GamePro* works with the editors at the site to highlight the best writing about video games and the associated culture. Donato proposes that video-game tutorials no longer respect a player's intelligence.

6 / **Xav de Matos** examines whether the unproven Eidos Montreal studio is up for the challenge of working on several prominent franchises, including Deus Ex. He is a Toronto-based freelance writer for *GamePro* and Joystiq and the host of The Freelancers, a podcast featuring tips for aspiring writers and war stories from veterans of the games industry. His last piece in the magazine was postmortem on Splinter Cell: Conviction in the July 2010 issue.

7 / **Max Morey** provides the timelines for the history the DC Comics and the evolution of superhero MMOs for AJ Glasser's piece on DC Universe Online. He is a video-game journalist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. An avid comic-book reader, Morey's firmly on Batman's side in the great "Batman vs. Superman" debate.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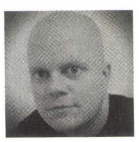
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NEED FOR SPEED'S NEED FOR CHANGE

I can still remember the first time I ever saw a Need for Speed game. It was on the 3DO (naturally) in 1994, and it was quite possibly the first time I remember someone using the now desperately overused term "next generation" to express how much better it was than everything that had gone before it. Sure, the Test Drive games had been perfectly *adequate* up to this point, but Need for Speed elevated things to a completely new level, and racing games have been drawing on many of its fundamental contributions to the genre ever since.

In the past 16 years, we've seen three very clear "ages" of the franchise. The early games, which focused primarily on exotics racing point-to-point challenges, served us well for 9 years before the PlayStation 2 release of Need for Speed: Underground ushered in the second age: illicit street racing, tuner culture, and an apparent need for badly written dialog read by C-list actors to convey terrible narrative threads. By the 2008 release of Need for Speed: Undercover, the series bottomed out in terms of quality despite still racking up millions in sales and finding itself as Electronic Arts' third largest property behind Madden and The Sims. The brand, it seemed, had become a victim of its own success thanks to the publisher's annualized release strategy. After the dismal reviews for Undercover, it seemed prudent for EA to take a break, regroup, and start again. Surprisingly, it did the opposite, announcing *four* new games: a sim, an arcade-style Wii game, an MMO, and a "mystery" game.

It soon became clear that this mystery title would be made by the guys at Criterion Games in the U.K., the team that changed everyone's expectations of racing games with the open-world Burnout: Paradise in 2008. Though Need for Speed: Shift arguably ushered in the third age of Need for Speed with a greater emphasis on quality and focus, it seems likely that Criterion's Hot Pursuit, a reimagining of a game from 1998, will be the standard-bearer for the future of the series. Using behavioral data gathered during two years of Burnout: Paradise play, the team has tailored their interpretation of Need for Speed to the way we all actually play games. It's not some misguided vision of how we should be playing—it's built on what we actually do. It's exciting; it's fast-paced; it's innovative—and you can read all about it in our world exclusive on page 66. G

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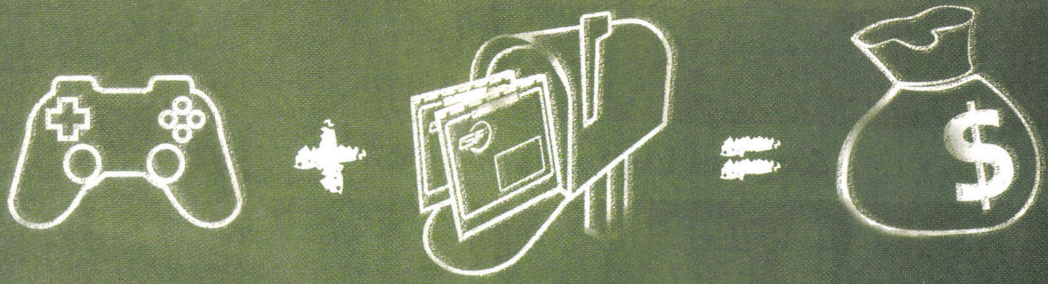

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August Letter *of the* Month

The Few, The Proud, The Meta

In response to "Gaming the Score: MetaCritic" by Julian Murdoch [*GamePro* #260, May 2010]

» As someone who uses MetaCritic as a convenient hub to easily access many different reviews of the same game, I find the site extremely useful—even if I still end up reading entire game reviews on individual sites rather than just looking at the aggregate "MetaScore."

As far as the future of ratings being determined by the gaming community goes, it would only work if there was a way to establish which community members could provide credible ratings versus those who are just trying to manipulate the overall score. I try not to pay attention to the user ratings on MetaCritic because they're always exaggerated in one way or another. For example, Settlers 7 for the PC has an aggregate review score of 80 from the critics but a 4.5 from the users, as many gamers, upset about Ubisoft's DRM, are rating the game zero without even playing it. Although I understand their frustration, a game should be rated based on its content rather than grievances from frustrated gamers.

Until sites like Metacritic find a way to determine which community members provide well-informed and credible reviews and which members are just trying to make a statement, any type of community MetaScore will remain unreliable.

DrOX-via Digg.com

I find it pretty mind-boggling that someone in marketing would be "graded" depending on how well the product they're trying to promote does review-wise. Their side of business is about getting people's attention and promoting the product in a positive and interesting light, not magically making a product better just by using words or ads.

DGeneral-via GamePro.com

Markets Made of Virtual Insanity

In response to "Analysis: Anatomy of an Alternate-Reality Game" by Alex Wawro [GamePro.com]

Alternate-reality games are much more immersive and diverse than what a single media platform offers. They can appeal to a larger audience while at the same time draw in a community of hardcore followers, so I doubt they'll be going away anytime soon. Even if they lose popularity with mainstream audiences, a significant number of people want more than what a single media outlet or console can provide.

ARGs can potentially be a very interesting platform as long as gamers are "in the know" as far as what to expect, content-wise. I can see it getting out of hand as marketers compete for people's attention with ARGs that end up as little more than immersive publicity stunts or in-depth product advertisements in light of an actual gameplay experience.

Munin-via GamePro.com

Save the Earth, Buy a Game

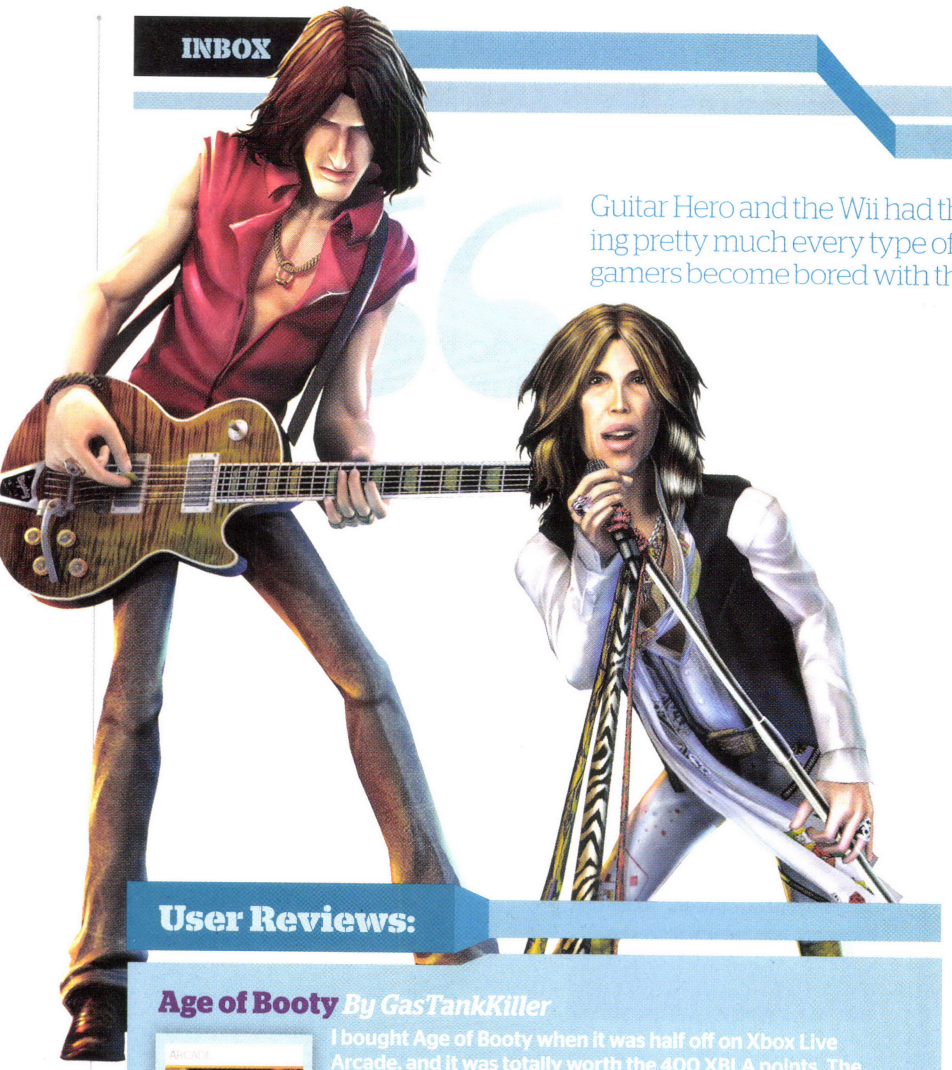
In response to "How Green is My Game?" by Oliver J. Chiang [*GamePro* #260, May 2010]

I've always been perplexed why game publishers say they're so threatened by the used-game business yet offer no buy-back program of their own to remove the old material from the market. Imagine if Nintendo offered a discount on a Virtual Console title if you sent them the original cartridge or if Microsoft did the same with Games on Demand.

Consumers would be interested if such programs had advantages, such as reduction of clutter in the home, the opportunity to

email letters, comments, ideas to feedback@gamepro.com

CONTINUED ON PG. 9



> Guitar Hero and the Wii had their time in the limelight, attracting pretty much every type of player imaginable. But, really, gamers become bored with the same thing over and over.

User Reviews:

Age of Booty *By GasTankKiller*

I bought Age of Booty when it was half off on Xbox Live Arcade, and it was totally worth the 400 XBLA points. The graphics are clean, and the controls are decent, but I didn't like that you couldn't change the in-game camera angle.

The game is a simple and addictive real-time strategy-based adventure, and if you can get your hands on it for around $5, as I did, you'll discover that it's definitely more than worth the price of admission. Age of Booty also comes with a map editor that lets you design your own missions.

If you're looking for a fun game to help pass the time, I say definitely try out Age of Booty. If you're still not sure, I suggest downloading the demo off of Xbox Live Arcade before you spend any money. ★★★★

Pokémon Platinum Version *By Ditto*

I've have been a fan of Pokémon since I was 8 years old, and even though I haven't played it in a while, I decided to dive right back in when I saw Pokémon Platinum Version at my local game store. And I'm glad I did—I forgot how much fun Pokémon is.

Although I never owned Pokémon Diamond or Pearl, I like the increased difficulty in Platinum over the original Red and Blue games. The gameplay is incredibly addictive as well—I haven't stopped playing since I bought it. The multiplayer is awesome, too, as I can trade and battle with my friends over Wi-Fi.

A few things bug me, however, like only being able trade with the Pokémon currently available in your party. Some Pokémon are nearly impossible to capture as well, which really defeats the "gotta catch 'em all!" mentality of the game. The music also annoys me at times, but that's okay, as I tend to play with the volume turned down. ★★★★★

redownload the game rather than have the disc get scratched and become unusable, and maybe even some guarantee that you can play the game on the next generation of consoles.
Imbarkus–via GamePro.com

The Used-Game Dilemma

In response to "Fleecing the Gamer?" by **Michael Rousseau** [*GamePro* #261, June 2010]

Many people say that used-game sales hurt the industry because no money goes to the publisher or developer. Here's the thing: If a game is genuinely good, people are less likely to sell it back in the first place, and the used-game sales are not going to hurt the developer or publisher as much as they help GameStop. GameStop basically survives on used-game sales; as the article states, they only make a small profit on every new game they sell. So, yes, buying used doesn't give any money to the publisher or developer. Unless you want to see GameStop go away, someone has to buy used games.
Colby Androus–via Bitmob.com

A Different Tune

In response to "Music Games Need To Refocus, Not Reboot" by **Joe Rybicki** [*GamePro* #260, May 2010]

Music games need to stop trying to be "party" games. At this point, the people who only play Rock Band or Guitar Hero on occasion have already bought their plastic instruments and don't play them enough to get tired of the 80 or so on-disc songs found in the game. Companies need to start focusing on those who enjoy improving at music games instead of those who only play them once in a while. Guitar Hero and the Wii had their time in the limelight, attracting pretty much every type of player imaginable. But, really, gamers become bored with the same thing over and over. The only people who really continue to buy these games are the hardcore gamers who really enjoy them. In my opinion, the games need to focus more on those people.
o0jrock0oo–via Digg.com

While I love what Harmonix is doing with the Rock Band Network to expand Rock Band's music catalog and attract new content, I think the whole idea of reiterating the fundamentals each year is nuts. To really move the genre forward, I think Nintendo had the right idea—let's see someone pick up the ball from Miyamoto and make a game like Wii Music that's a little more immersive but a little less toylike.
Urdnotgrunt–via GamePro.com

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GamePro.com Poll

Question:
What kind of games do you want to see come from the Bungie/Activision partnership?

A new Bungie IP with no Spartans in sight:

56%

A futuristic Call of Duty game:

17%

A spiritual successor to Halo:

13%

An official sequel to Oni:

7%

An official sequel to Myth:

7%

GamePro on Twitter

davidscottjaffe: I assure you my story was not as simple as Kratos going after the Norse gods. There is an element of truth to it, but it goes far beyond that.

NuclearStr1der: Disappointed that Bungie, one of my favorite studios, would team up with the dev-killers at Activision.

farre: At work reading a @GamePro magazine. I love my job.

HOOdfigga92: Halo: Reach is going to be the best game out there.

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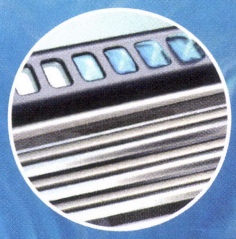

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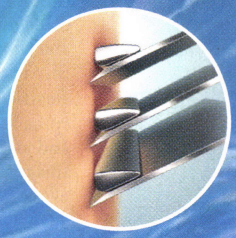

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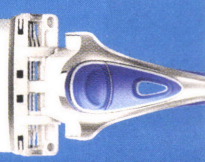

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ANDREW PFISTER

Paralyzed by Fear

The greatest strength of video games frequently prevents them from achieving true terror.

Your eyes open suddenly, and in the gray light of early dawn, they lock on the bedside alarm clock. 4:35 a.m. That's not right. It should still be dark. You start to get out of bed...only you can't move at all. Something is wrong. Everything goes quiet...and then you feel it. You don't know what it is, but something is in the room with you. Or is it some*one*? You can't see it, but you know it's the most horrifying thing in the world, and you feel like you could die. You scream for help, and though you feel it in your throat, no sound comes out. An electric sensation rips up your spine and rattles your brain, and just as you realize that this is the greatest fear you've ever experienced...you wake up again. 5:34 a.m. For real, this time. And aside from a little shortness of breath, everything is fine.

Sleep paralysis is when the brain misfires during the REM stage of sleep, and though people experience it in different ways, it always comes with an element of deep fear, true *terror*, that stems from a full awareness of your surroundings but a complete inability to control anything. The experience is so lucid that it's considered as a possible source of stories regarding demonic possession and alien abductions. And though it's ultimately harmless—it's symptomatic of sleep deprivation or high stress—it's nonetheless terrifying.

Which makes me wonder, the day after I suffered my first episode of sleep paralysis in nearly five years, why video games are so ineffective at scaring me.

Though I consider myself a tough guy when it comes to horror, the occasional movie or book—usually just a scene or two—resonates with the fear center of my brain. In M. Night Shyamalan's *Signs*, it's the scene in the moonless cornfield when Mel Gibson's flashlight catches a glimpse of a long, gray leg. I know *exactly* what that setting feels like: As a child, I used to run through tall cornstalks on warm August nights while living on my grandmother's farm for a few years. Despite my love of the outdoors, I refused to go camping for years following *The Blair Witch Project* because of that tent scene. You know which one.

I struggle to think of anything I've experienced in a game that elicited a similar response. Some of Eternal Darkness's creepy moments are well done, but they merely flirt with "unsettling." Resident Evil, and by extension, any game featuring zombies, just translates into campy fun. Dead Space is all about constant tension rather than the fear of alien threats. I imagine that the Silent Hill and Fatal Frame series both have more of what I'm looking for when it comes to really getting under my skin. But I'm guessing that what makes games less scary than movies, books, or even TV has little to do with stories, characters, settings, or gore (or a lack thereof). Ironically, it's video games' strongest, unique feature that takes away from the horror: control.

When faced with unimaginable digital horror, I'm frequently outfitted with an array of weapons and tools to deal with it. Or I can run away, and by the time I get to the end of the level, I've wiped that fear from memory. The whole point of games, after all, is for us to win, and knowing that we're going to win lessens the fright factor—especially when we know we have multiple attempts. Anything with a static script removes the ability to control the outcome from our hands, placing us at the author's mercy. (This is why roller coasters freak some out.)

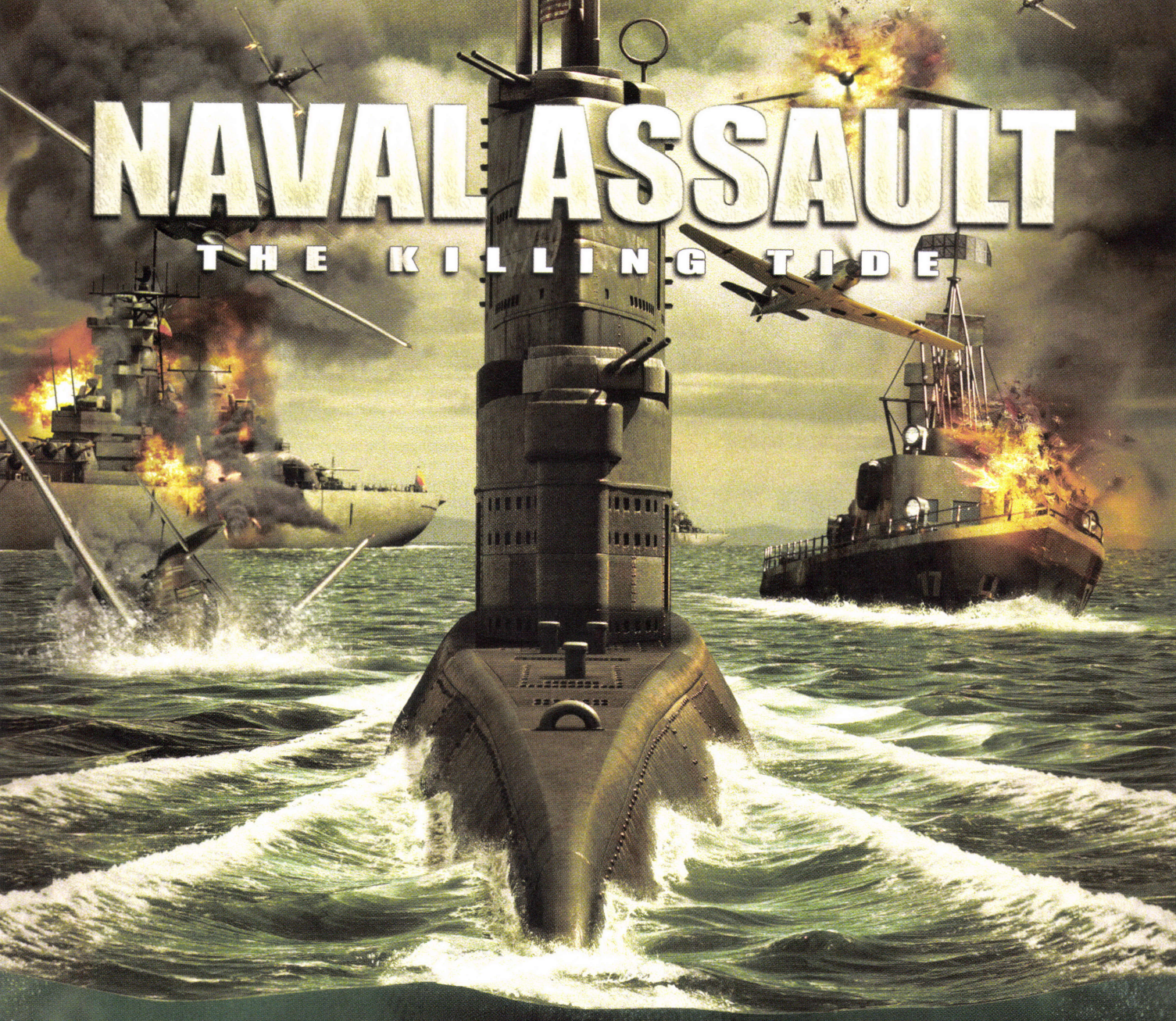
So in order to scare me, you need to take away my control. Is that impossible to do in a video game? No. You just need to be creative. I mentioned Resident Evil as something that lacks fear, but what generates genuine paranoia in Resident Evil 3 is Nemesis' relentless pursuit of you throughout the game; he's going to catch up to you, no matter what you do. Eternal Darkness leaps out of its virtual world and starts lying about deleting your memory card. Alan Wake does some great things with sound, mood, and characters that helps support an otherwise standard action game.

> **"ANYTHING WITH A STATIC SCRIPT REMOVES THE ABILITY TO CONTROL THE OUTCOME FROM OUR HANDS, PLACING US AT THE AUTHOR'S MERCY."**

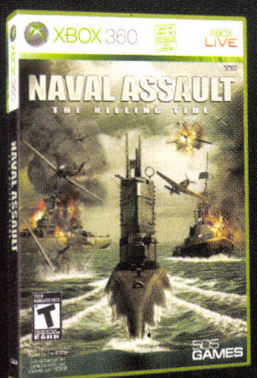
But it's a scene in Heavy Rain that exemplifies the idea that games and terror can mix well. Madison Paige wakes in the dark to find herself strapped to a table, unable to move...and something...some*one*...is in the room with her...and you know that she could die.

Now *that* is something I can relate to.

Andrew Pfister is the senior games editor of G4tv.com and the producer of the weekly G4 webshow, Feedback.



TAKE COMMAND OF THE TIDES OF WAR



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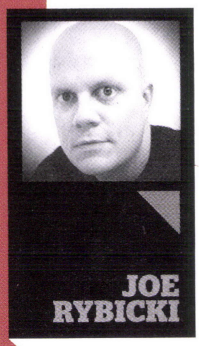


JOE RYBICKI

One-Band Wonders

Are single-band music games a good idea?

With Green Day: Rock Band having recently hit shelves, it seems like everyone's trying to figure out whether single-band releases are good for the music-game market. I can certainly understand the confusion; up to this point, these games have been a pretty mixed bag in terms of quality. In order of release, we got Guitar Hero: Aerosmith, which earned fairly lackluster reviews; shortly thereafter, Guitar Hero: Metallica released to widespread praise. Later that year, The Beatles: Rock Band scored high marks in nearly every review...but 2009 ended with the release of the almost universally reviled Guitar Hero: Van Halen. (As of this writing, the reviews aren't in for Green Day, but if the mixed reaction the game's gotten so far is any indication, we're likely to see a wide variety in review scores.)

So, clearly, quality has been all over the map—and sales have suffered a similar fate. IGN.com recently broke down the sales of each of the four games released through 2009, and the results were surprising. Aerosmith, for example, racked up huge sales in spite of mediocre reviews, to the tune of more than 2.5 million units sold. But The Beatles took a distant second place, with about 1.3 million. Metallica held a solid third place with just more than 1 million units.

Van Halen, you ask? You don't want to know. Really, you don't. OK, fine: How do 94,000 units strike you? That's not a misprint; a game featuring one of the most celebrated guitar virtuosos in history really did sell less than 100,000 copies. (Yes, these dismal numbers are no doubt largely the result of Activision giving the game away with purchases of Guitar Hero 5. But even so, they're pretty depressing.) Even sales of The Beatles: Rock Band proved somewhat disappointing given the strength of the Rock Band brand and the worldwide popularity of The Beatles.

So does this mean we ought to abandon the idea of the single-band game? Well, setting Van Halen aside, even a million units is nothing to sneeze at—not when you're talking about a game that requires specialized peripherals. Those peripherals limit the pool of potential buyers to those who either already own instrument controllers or have the means to purchase high-priced bundles in the midst of a tanking economy.

> **"A MILLION UNITS IS NOTHING TO SNEEZE AT—NOT WHEN YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT A GAME THAT REQUIRES SPECIALIZED PERIPHERALS."**

So it's clear a market exists for this sort of thing. And given that the games presumably cost a bit less to make (since they're reusing technology from the flagship releases), it's likely both Activision and Harmonix will continue to pump these games out. If so, I'd like to humbly propose three guiding principles to help ensure these games *continue* to do well:

First, commit to a band. Activision's practice of including songs that influenced the main band made a certain sense in Aerosmith but got somewhat more puzzling with Metallica—and downright silly with Van Halen. Pick a band with the catalog and cachet to carry the game on its own, or don't do it at all.

Second, recognize you're making a game almost exclusively for fans. You'll be tempted to only pick the best-known songs from the band, but I promise you: These games will be bought by very few people who aren't already intimately familiar with the band. So go ahead and dust off those deep cuts, and don't feel obligated to slap every radio hit on the disc. (In fact, why not release the really big songs as DLC in your main store, and offer them free—or discounted, at the very least—to owners of the band-centric game?)

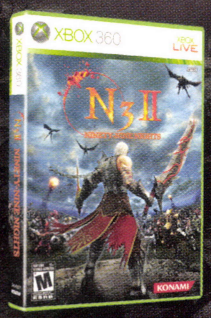
Finally, add value wherever you can. Harmonix's practice of offering unlockable archival material in The Beatles and Green Day is a good one, but it could go further. I understand developers may not be willing to use single-band games to introduce gameplay features the flagship games don't have. But if the core gameplay is going to be essentially the same as the main game, you'll always face the valid question of why the release isn't just a DLC megapack. Take every available opportunity to give owners of a single-band game something the main game doesn't have.

Will following these rules make every game universally appealing? Not a chance. This is the downside of any single-band game: You're always, *always* going to have critics and fans alike shouting "Why this band, and not that one?" But if the games stay focused on what the people who *are* excited about them actually want, maybe they'll be successful enough to ensure that everyone's favorite bands get a turn.

—

***Joe Rybicki** is a freelance writer who has spent the last 13 years covering the video-game industry. He currently runs Plastic Axe, a blog about music games. Visit him at www.plasticaxe.com and follow him on Twitter at www.twitter.com/plasticaxe.*

WHEN THE NIGHTS BEGIN, THE DARKNESS ENDS



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XBOX 360

JOE DONATO

Teaching Game Rules Naturally

Tutorials in modern games insult the intelligence of players.

After the opening cut-scene of the 1998 Sega Saturn role-playing game Panzer Dragoon Saga, the game subjects you to a seemingly random bit of gameplay. It's the first time the game gives you control of the protagonist, Edge. He stands in a narrow hallway. Brown, pixelated walls warp and stutter as the Saturn's processors struggle to maintain the scene. The view from over Edge's shoulder reveals walls on either side that extend into darkness. You only have one way to go: forward. But how? Most players would assume you simply press Up on the directional pad (they'd be right). Others may begin to fumble with the controls, pressing buttons until they get the desired result. Eventually they'd figure it out, and no matter how long they took, the game would never punish or condescend.

As Edge proceeds, the end of the hall comes into view. Strange objects sit in a room, and naturally, the player must interact with them. Again, players fumble around with the buttons. They find functions: a run button, camera rotation, and a cursor to interact with objects. Highlighting an object, players may find it's too far away, but they learn that Edge gives insights on something no matter what the distance. They get closer to the mysterious white box in the room, opening it to reveal an elevator key. They now know these objects contain items. They use the elevator key, and the next cut-scene begins.

At this point, the player has watched a 10-minute intro, walked into an elevator, and watched another cut-scene. This bit of gameplay spliced into the introduction seems inconsequential. And yet without an obvious tutorial or dialog box, the player now understands the basics of interacting with the game. Panzer Dragoon Saga perfectly represents the primordial ooze that eventually became the games we play today. This was a game ahead of its time, and you can see its early influences in many modern games.

Most modern games opt instead to talk down to players. A similar sequence plays out, but they explain even the most basic commands through graphics rather than gameplay and experimentation. With game controls becoming more standardized, developers have more opportunity for experimental tutorials than ever before. Yet they're incredibly rare. How many first-person games begin with one low obstacle and one high obstacle followed by a "Press 'A' to Jump" prompt? How many full-screen, action-halting splash pages must we endure before developers realize they're breaking immersion?

Lazy tutorials stem from a fear that gamers will grow frustrated and quit. And it could be that an unfortunate few fired up Panzer Dragoon Saga and spent hours lost in that tiny hallway. But that's a chance the developers took, allowing the majority of players to figure out the rules in an elegant, natural fashion. Panzer Dragoon Saga does have an extensive combat tutorial; 15 minutes later, it introduces players to the game's RPG combat system through an itemized list of multiparagraph tutorials—exactly the kind of thing I'm suggesting developers avoid. But again, Saga came out during a time of growth. The developers' toolbox was not as rigidly defined as it is now, and abstract ideas tend to form the base for RPG battle systems.

But there's nothing abstract about pressing one button and getting a response. While it may be important to explain more complex ideas, game developers should leave some concepts to experimentation and discovery. This goes beyond controls and into more general concepts like the rules of the game's world and enemies. Imagine if a prompt in Halo explained that smaller enemies scatter when you kill their leader. The problem is this is already starting to happen. BioShock 2 explains just about everything through onscreen prompts and audio warnings several times in advance.

If games continue down this road, they will lose any sense of discovery or experimentation. Quick-and-dirty text prompts and guide arrows will water down the artistic merit of game design. Perhaps this is only a phase. In the previous generation, games subjected players to barren, soulless, extensive opening tutorials before they could even play the game. Today's games work these tutorials neatly into the gameplay.

Games are the realm of thinking people. Let's keep it that way.

"IMAGINE IF A PROMPT IN HALO EXPLAINED THAT SMALLER ENEMIES SCATTER WHEN YOU KILL THEIR LEADER."

***Joe Donato** can't believe he got Panzer Dragoon Saga in a 2010 issue of GamePro. Joe writes about games for Critical Gamer and his site, RedRingCircus.com.*

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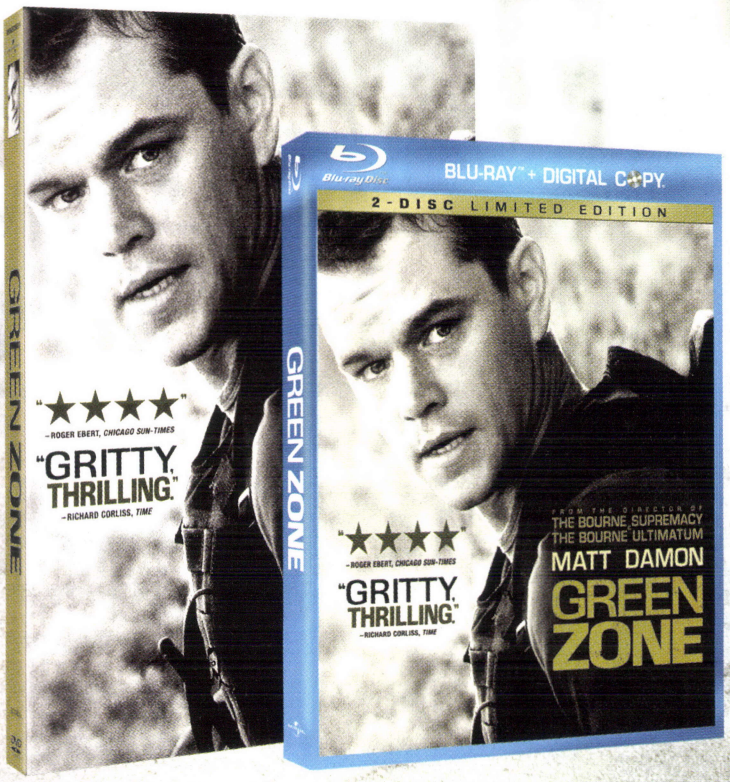

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VIOLENCE AND LANGUAGE

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Red Faction: Armageddon

THE SEQUEL TO 2009'S RED FACTION: GUERRILLA PROMISES A STRONGER NARRATIVE AND EVEN CRAZIER WAYS TO WREAK HAVOC ON THE PLANET MARS.

2009's Red Faction: Guerrilla is the perfect literal representation of a "sandbox" game: Replace the tyrannical Earth Defense Force with toy soldiers, the tanks with tractors, and the versatile sledgehammer with sand shovels and the analogy becomes clearer. Much like the playgrounds of our youth, Guerrilla offers a vast world to tinker with, and it speaks directly to our inherent desire to see and partake in destruction (and to a lesser degree, creation). The secret of its success is simple: It's an unadulterated expression of that universal drive to take apart our "toys."

Developer: Volition // Publisher: THQ // Release Date: March 2011

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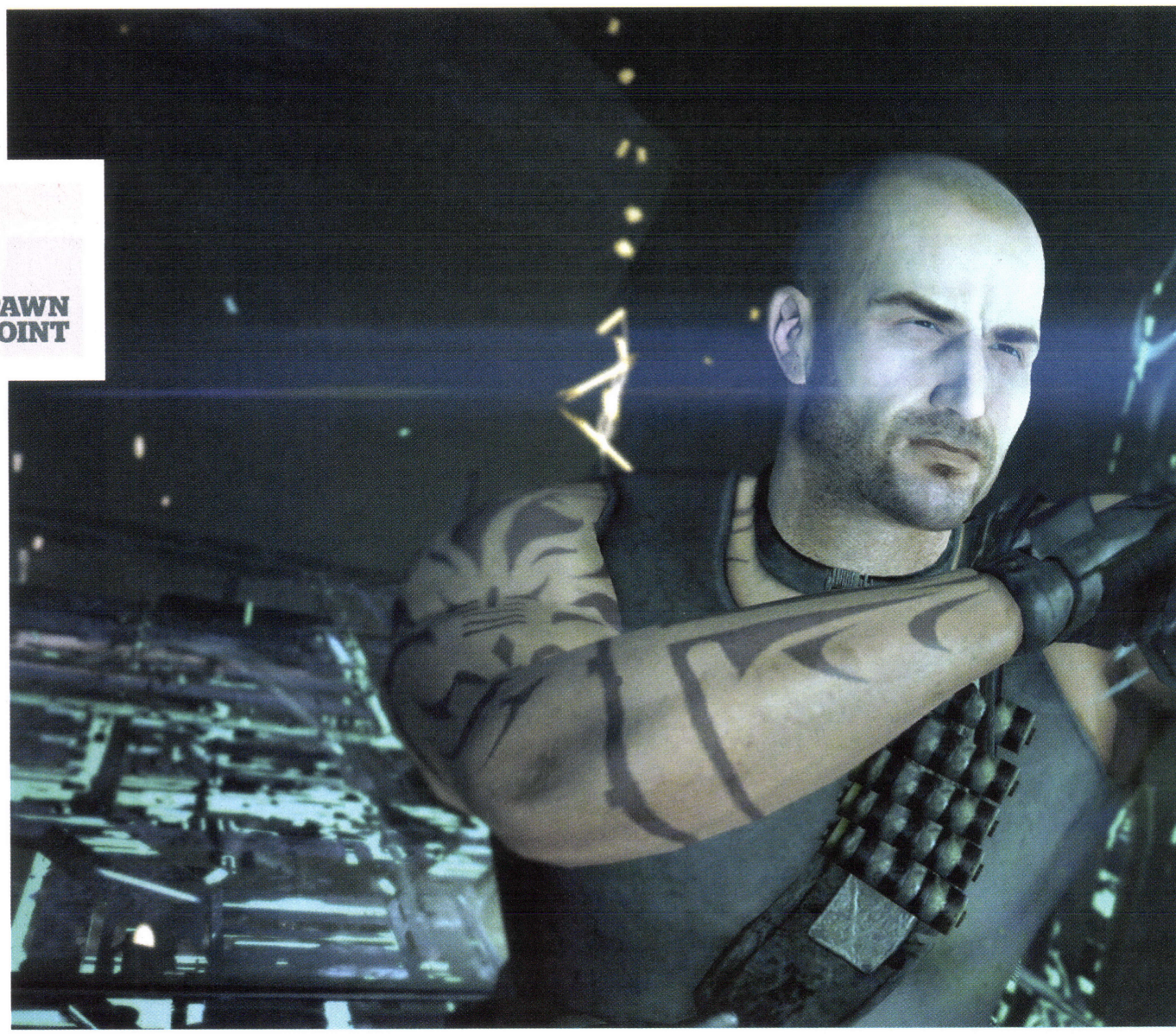


But as we mature and leave the sandbox behind, we become more aware of the consequences of our actions. As our childish tendencies turn into adult responsibilities, we can no longer blindly destroy, just as we cannot mindlessly create:

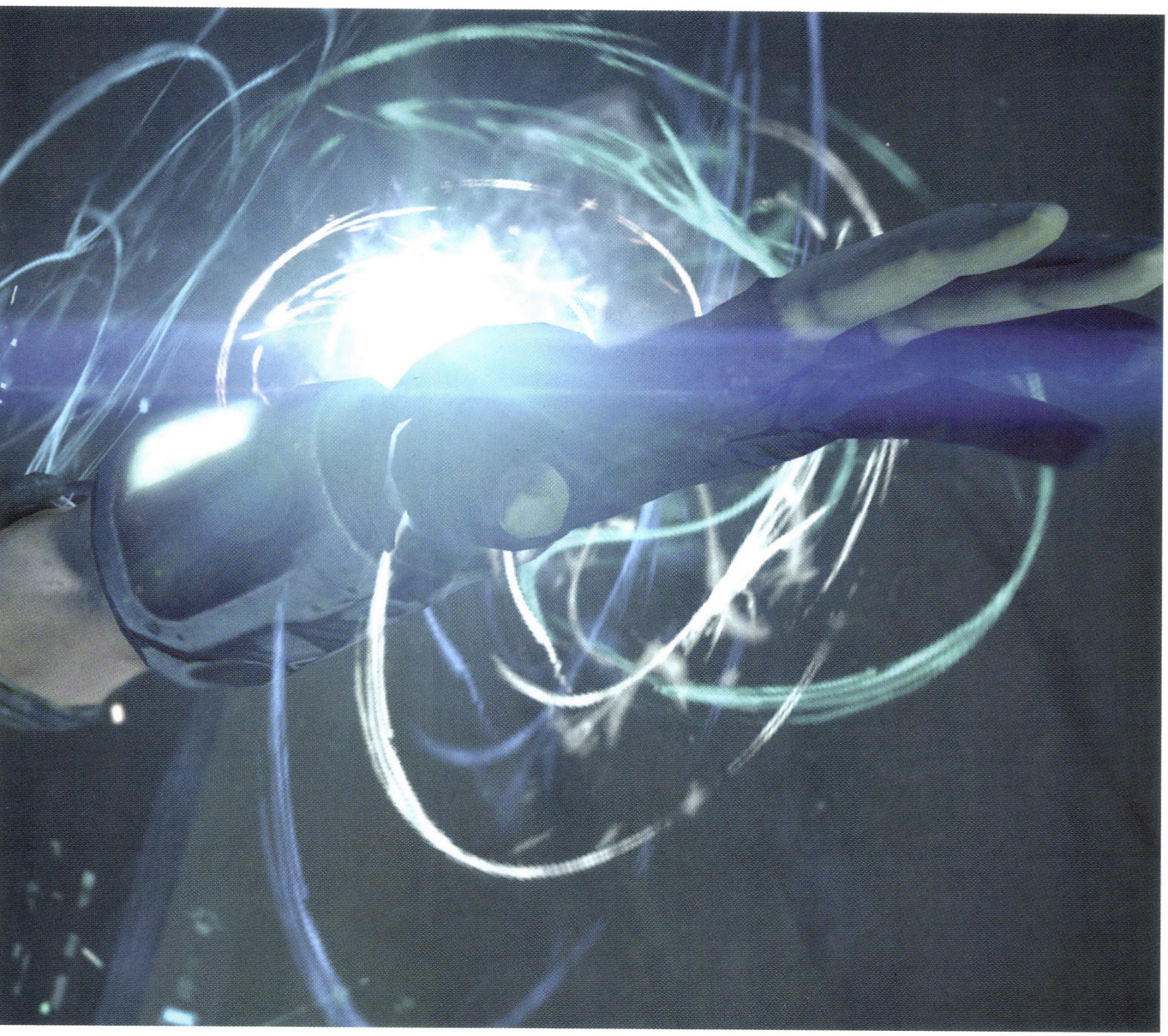
RED FACTION: ARMAGEDDON

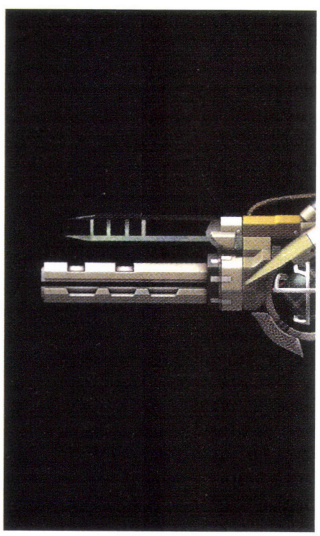
Context becomes critical because it gives meaning to our destructive and creative acts. In a video-game setting, the bulk of this responsibility falls on the narrative and the game's characters: These two critical aspects of the experience are necessary to frame our actions. This is especially true in an open-world, or "sandbox," environment, where the world bends to your will. This proves to be Red Faction: Guerrilla's biggest fault: Its story is decidedly flimsy, and although the novelty of its highly entertaining and well-executed destruction-based gameplay makes it great, the thin premise isn't enough to hold up its end of the bargain. (Consider, for instance, that in order to liberate Mars, you nonsensically run around destroying the very infrastructure that you would need to maintain the areas you were reclaiming.)

So this is the challenge facing Red Faction: Armageddon: It must not only recapture the first title's sense of childish glee but also provide a strong context to ensure that the many acts of wanton destruction that players commit are both meaningful and satisfying.

The first thing the developers are doing to address this is changing the game's setting and backdrop: Armageddon's still set on Mars, but rather than explore the dusty surface of the red planet, they force you deep underground. Jim Boone, senior producer for Red Faction: Armageddon, explains. "In the 70 years since the end of Guerrilla, the marauders and colonists continued terraforming Mars, living in an uneasy peace. But during the prologue of the game, we learn that the surface has become unlivable—essentially, there's a perpetual hurricane ravaging the surface. The colonists moved down beneath the surface once the storms began and started a society down there. The only people left up above are the crazy bastards."

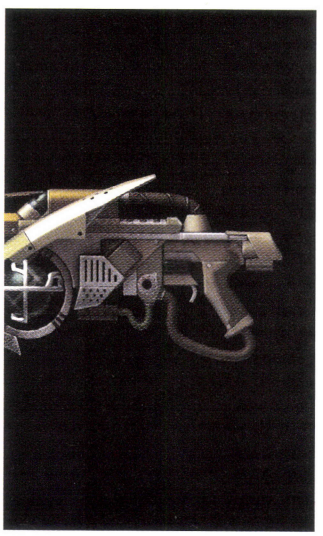
The change of scenery from the open vastness of the surface to an underground society may appear limiting, but the development team actually considers it as an advantage. "Moving down below has aided us in creating more dense areas to implement the Geo-Mod system," Boone says. "We're able to craft environments that have





multiple buildings very close to one another, and we can do a lot of cascading destruction that way. We always joke around internally that there are only so many ways you can differentiate the look of Mars. It's red."

Beneath the surface of Mars, players take control of Darius, the grandson of Alec and Samanya from Guerrilla. The passing of 70 years leads to the emergence of new technology; these advancements give players fresh ways to interact with the environment as well as new opportunities to exploit the Geo-Mod engine. "Since Darius is the grandson of Alec and Samanya from Guerrilla, they've continued to pass the Nanoforge technology down from one generation to the next," Design



Director David Azbug says. "Since time has passed, there are a ton of new ways he'll be able to use this technology in Armageddon. It's become an extremely powerful multipurpose tool now.

"We've also added the ability to repair the world around you. Anything you've destroyed, you can bring back and then destroy again if you want to!" Azburg says, laughing. "I worked on that tool in Guerrilla's multiplayer, so I just took it with me to this project."

As crucial as setting is to a game, the actual narrative arc carries equal importance. With Guerrilla, the team at Volition poured a substantial amount of time into creating the Geo-Mod 2.0 engine; this provides the Armageddon team with a

preexisting foundation to work with. They could now focus more on aspects like the story.

"We're coming out with a sequel using the same engine, and I've yet to see a game that's even matched what Guerrilla did a year and a half ago," Abzug states.

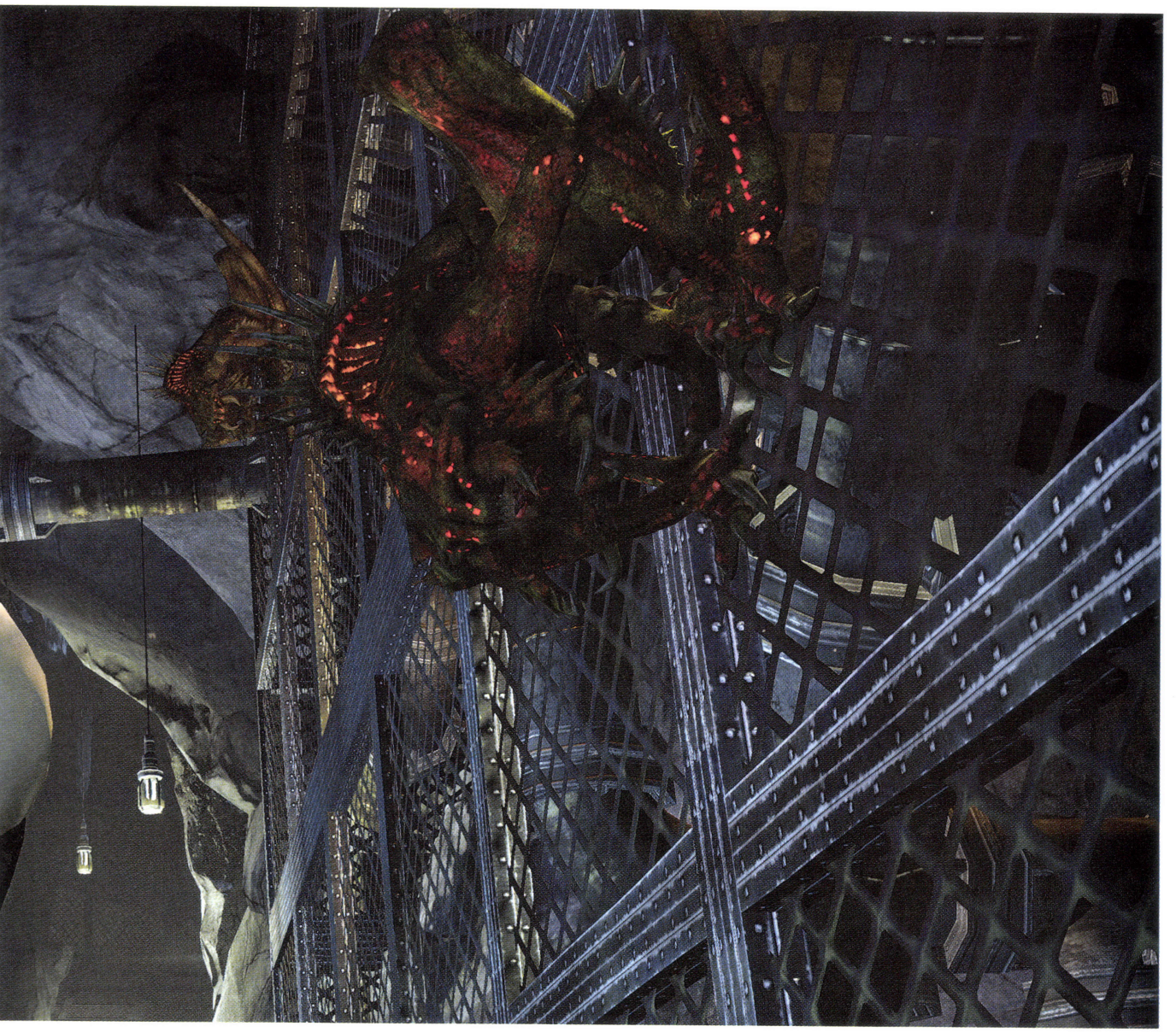
Boone concurs. "That engine was a beast to get finished, and it took a lot of talented people here a gargantuan amount of time to get it working. But now we have all that extra time to put into other aspects of the game. The theme of Armageddon is a bit different than the previous three games. Those mainly dealt with fighting against an oppressive group, but with this one we're going with a different approach to the overall story, though you'll still see the element of 'helping out the underdogs.' Also, as you might guess from the title, all is not well with Darius and his people." Boone pauses and laughs. "We try to be mindful of maintaining the lineage from one game to the next. Not to give too many details away, [but] you'll see some familiar faces in a much different way in Armageddon."

In order to emphasize the story, Volition's streamlining Armageddon's approach to mission structure. Rather than navigating an area with dozens of tiny mission icons on it, the developers promise that the variety found throughout missions in Armageddon will equal the many short-spurt offerings from Guerrilla.

"In terms of the mechanisms by which you get access to missions in the game, it'll be quite different than what Guerrilla did," Boone says. "In terms of the variety in the missions, though, that's something we're most proud of. When we look at all the missions in Armageddon, there is something unique and significant in damn near every one of them. We think fans will be really pleased with the kind of variety they'll get from one mission to the next."

Throughout missions players toy with a number of weapons and vehicles, and as with all Red Faction games, the sense of variety sounds promising. The first new weapon the team has whipped up is the versatile magnet gun. "The magnet gun fires two projectiles," Abzug says. "You fire the first one into something, and then the second one into something else, and whatever you launched the first one into goes flying into the second one. You could rip the wall off a building with this sucker—imagine an entire wall flying in 12 different pieces at a group of enemies because you targeted them with one of the projectiles."

"When you describe it, it sounds cool, but once you get your hands on it, it's unbelievable," Boone adds. "It's definitely the signature weapon of our



game, and it really changes how you play the game. Additionally, we know we're a destruction-based game, and we've created our other weapons according to [that philosophy]."

Vehicles are also a mainstay of the series, and though it's a bit early for the team to reveal much, they remain mindful of what the fans want. Additionally, they're well aware of the potential of the near-future setting. "We've spent a lot of time thinking about what types of vehicles we could do, since so much time has passed since the events of Guerrilla, but also the types of gameplay we want to feature in Armageddon," Boone says. "There will definitely be a variety of vehicles that represent that advancement in technology."

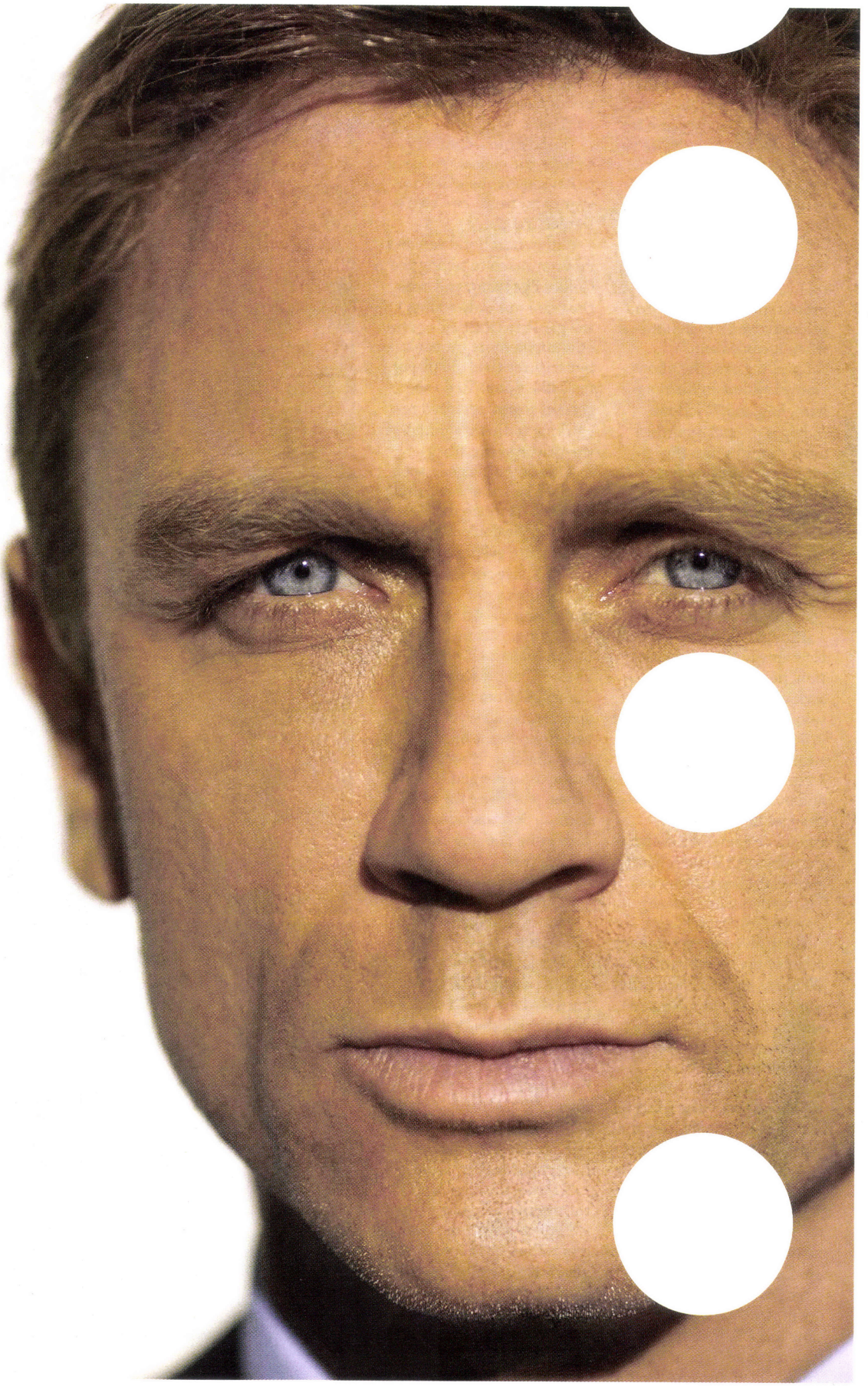
The game is still a ways off, but Boone and Abzug have already ratcheted up my hopes for the sequel to one of my favorite games of 2009. The team makes its fondness for the series quite clear as we chat, and they're continually working to flesh it out. A statement from Boone sums up Volition's feelings toward the series: "I always think of Red Faction as a vehicle for us to do the kind of game we want to do. What I mean by that is in Volition's history, we've had the opportunity to work in many genres, but with Red Faction I think it's become the embodiment of what Volition is really all about. We can still do new things from one game to the next, and I think that's a hallmark of the series for us." ***–Andy Burt***

BOND IS BACK

GOLDENEYE 007 RETURNS IN 2010 WITH A REVAMPED STORY AND A NEW BOND.

FIRST-LOOK

JAMES BOND HAS UNDERGONE A RADICAL TRANSFORMATION SINCE BOTH THE GOLDENEYE FILM AND THE NINTENDO 64 GAME CAUGHT THE PUBLIC'S ATTENTION OVER 10 YEARS AGO. TO SIMPLY CREATE AN "UPDATED" VERSION OF THE ORIGINAL WOULD IGNORE THE TRANSFORMATION OF BOND OVER THE YEARS—AS WELL AS THE EVOLUTION OF THE FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER. ACTIVISION'S TAKING A MORE CALCULATED ROUTE GOING INTO 2010'S GOLDENEYE 007 REBOOT, DRAWING ON DANIEL CRAIG'S BOND, A FIRMER GRASP ON THE ORIGINAL FILM, AND, OF COURSE, MANY NODS TO THE ORIGINAL GAME.



"It's great to finally be able to talk about it, because for months we've been dancing around the subject of what game we're working on," Activision Producer Julian Widdows says. "When friends in the industry ask me what I've been up to, I've had to say, 'It's a small project, nothing, really. You probably won't even notice it when it comes out.'"

Speaking over the phone from his home in Birmingham, England, Widdows indulges me as I reminisce a few minutes into the interview about my countless memories of playing four-player split-screen GoldenEye 007 with a few friends. He slyly responds, "Wouldn't it be great if you could somehow do that again in the 2010 version of the game?"

Though Widdows' jocular tone threads our conversation, he understands the serious business at hand: developer Eurocom's Nintendo Wii reboot of GoldenEye. It's clear that Widdows and his team have some significant—and possibly controversial—changes in store for the venerable game. We switch to the subject of Bond himself, and what I learn stuns me: The team ditched Pierce Brosnan for Daniel Craig, the current silver-screen embodiment of the secret agent. As Widdows explains, what they wanted to do with the game required the switch.

"It was really early on when we decided to put Daniel Craig in the game," Widdows says. "The thing is, James Bond is only ever one person. Different actors get to represent this person, but he can only be one guy at any given time. When you talk to the guys at EON Danjaq [the holding company that has produced every Bond film since *Dr. No*, the franchise's debut, 1962] about the time and effort they took in creating this very contemporary Bond, you learn that the character needs to be of its time.

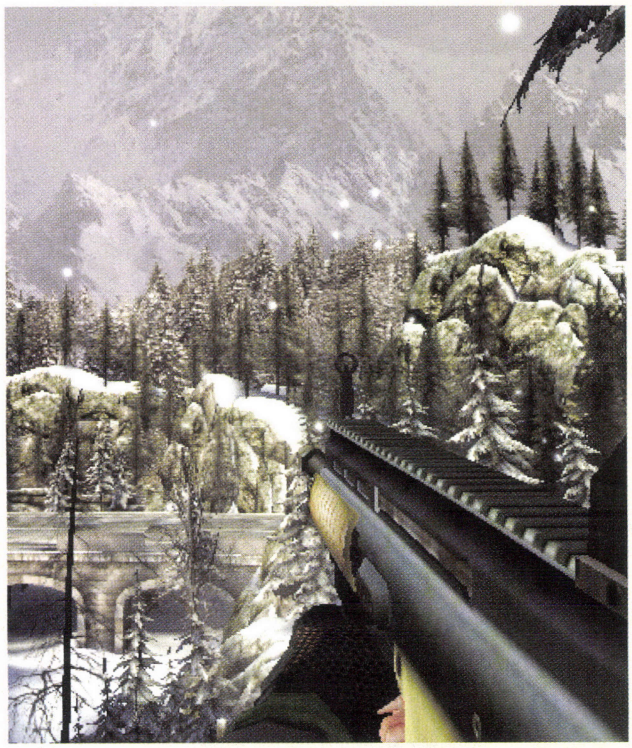
"Bond's moved on, and so have the games. We need to have someone who's relevant and fresh, and that's Daniel Craig."

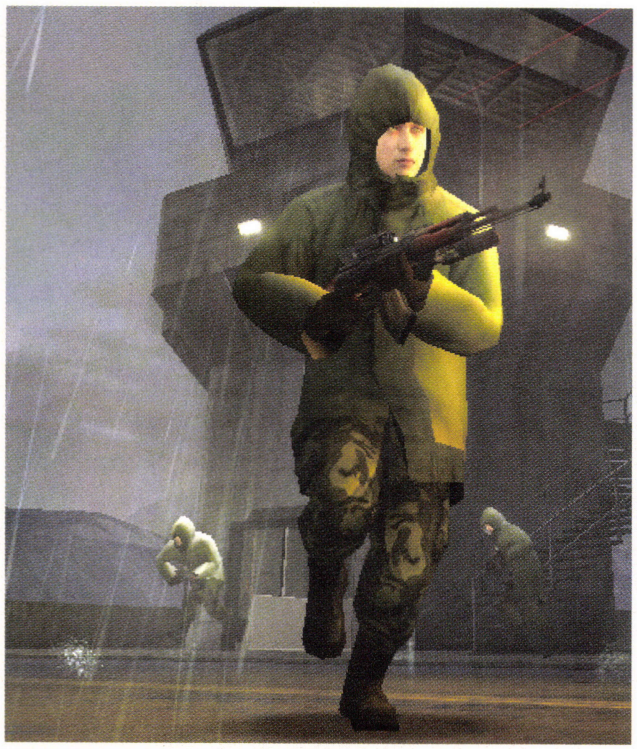
With a new Bond comes a new approach to telling the GoldenEye story, and here the team not only adapts the game to fit Craig's more emotional, more human take but ensures that the player feels like Bond. To do so, certain scenes required reworking to further immerse the player in the story.

"One of the big goals was to make sure that everything you see is through the eyes of Bond. We don't cut away to scenes or events that he couldn't have any knowledge of. We don't want to break immersion by cutting a scene and saying, 'Meanwhile, over in the evil lair...,'" Widdows jokes. "That presents some challenges from a design perspective, because you have to experience some of the events from the film differently. For example, in our game the player gets to see the EMP blast on Severnaya firsthand. That's one of many examples, and we're really pleased with the results of these changes."

Changing the story too much, though, could potentially cause confusion for fans of both the film and the classic N64 game, but Widdows and his team are covering their bases by enlisting writing talent from the film. "We're working with Bruce Feirstein, who wrote the original screenplay for GoldenEye," Widdows says. "He's really helped reimagine the script for this game."

"Certain nostalgic nods to the original are going to exist, but the key thing in all of this is that we're creating an up-to-date GoldenEye experience that draws primarily from the film. There are a lot of things the original game





did that, these days, we wouldn't necessarily want to do. There are also a lot of things that the original game had to avoid that we *can* do. One example is at the end of the airfield scene, when Bond dives off the cliff and lands in the plane—that's a playable section in our game."

While Widdows recognizes the need to sate the nostalgia of fans of the original, he hopes that players perceive the new GoldenEye as an accurate representation of what Craig's Bond is all about while still staying true to the original story. As Widdows explains, he and the team aren't necessarily obliged to stick to every aspect of the Bond character—they only need to deal with those that fit with the game's theme and feel true to the new Bond.

"We often refer back to 'pillar statements' that we came up with upon starting development on GoldenEye, things that we deem are important for the title," Widdows says. "Player choice is first and foremost, and obviously being a secret agent is one of them. You might expect that having gadgets to be one of them, but it's not. Craig's Bond has moved away from that in the films; it's not about watches with lasers anymore, since Craig is a much more physical representation of the Bond character. He's described in one of the more recent films by M as a 'blunt instrument.' The gadgets aren't totally gone, but they don't play as big a role in our game."

Though gadgets sit low on the priority list for "GoldenEye 2010," Widdows reveals that multiplayer remains a vital aspect of the GoldenEye experience, and like Bond himself, this needed to evolve to fit the new game.

"There's a spread of features that we're offering with multiplayer," Widdows says. "Online is a big part, but also what I was alluding to earlier—dancing around it, really—playing four-player split-screen with classic characters will be offered as well."

"We think that our support of the Classic Controller in addition to the standard Wii Remote-Nunchuk setup will make the game much more appealing to the core audience; they'll likely find that setup more familiar," Widdows says. "Aside from that, we want people to see this as the ultimate GoldenEye package, with things you won't see anywhere else. We've got multiple routes through missions and destructible environments, both of which many shooters shy away from because these things are expensive to implement. Then we've got the multiplayer, so we're hoping everything together makes the game a compelling package."

Before my conversation with Widdows, I only had seen a scant few minutes of the game and really didn't get a strong impression of how the finished product may turn out. I don't get to speak to such an impassioned game developer often, and with a product like GoldenEye on the line, it's reassuring that Widdows has a deep adoration for the original. Whether fans of the original game "get" the inclusion of Daniel Craig or not, Widdows makes a strong argument for why he's there, and why he is, at this moment in time, the true representation of James Bond.

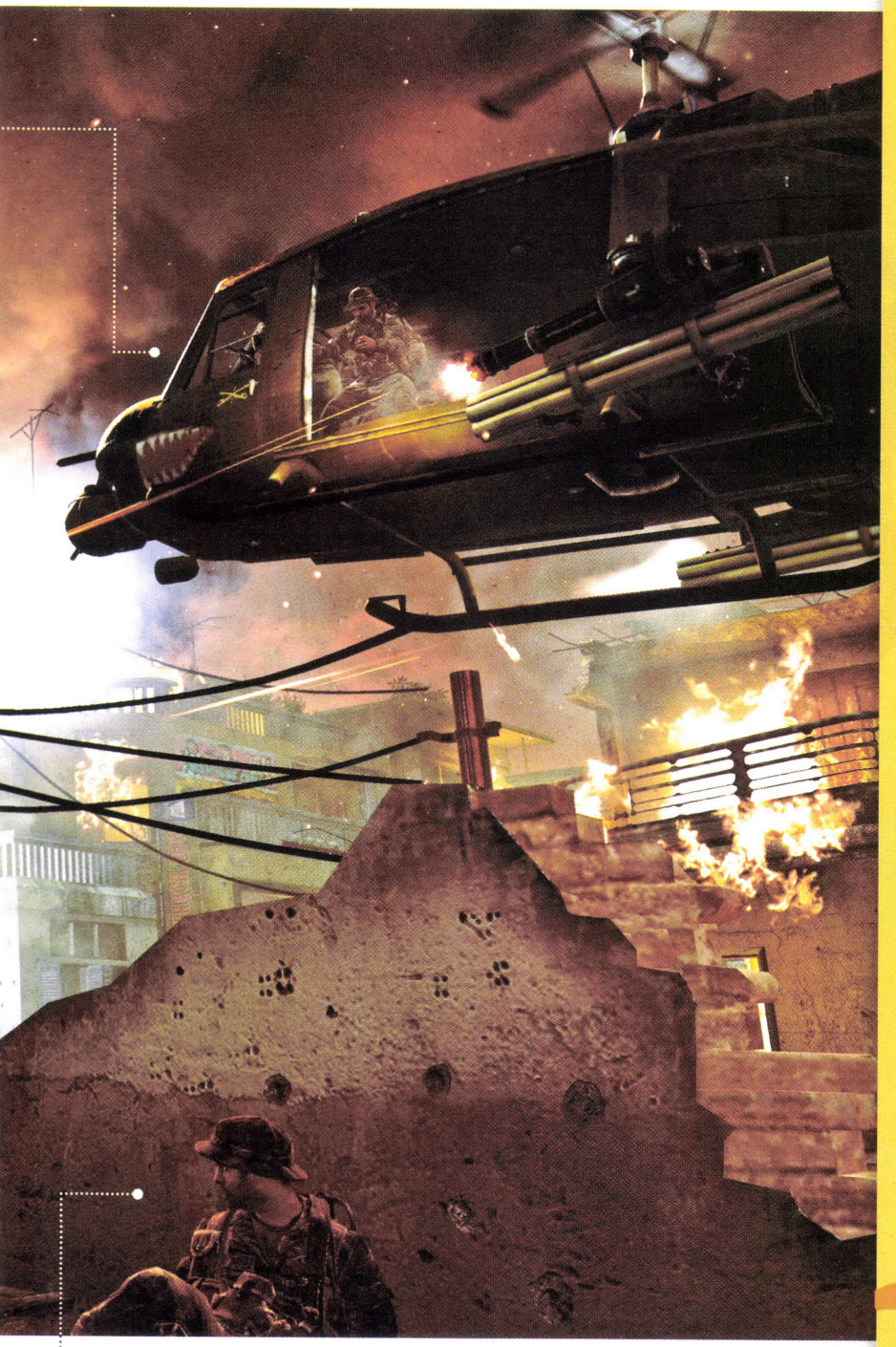
Gamers can determine if the GoldenEye 007 reboot is a true representation of the Bond franchise for themselves when it hits shelves this winter.—***Andy Burt***

SNAP-SHOT

"We consulted with Major John Plaster, who's the foremost author on SOG and was also a member of the elite group. He told us these amazing stories about the SOG's power—they could commandeer a general's jeep right out from [under] him if they needed to. We took a lot of inspiration from the stories he told us to shape the narrative, although some of the things he told us were almost unbelievable. One of his books, aptly titled *SOG*, was required reading for everyone on this project."

"This is the first time in a Call of Duty game where the player character has a voice. In previous games you'd be a kind of Private Miller-type character, going along for the ride. But now you're at the forefront—you have the ultimate power in all situations."

"The soldier with his back against the wall has been trying to call in a helicopter for support, but command keeps telling him that it's not possible. You happen to come up upon him, and you realize the street ahead is completely overrun. You grab the radio away from him and call for helicopter support, even though the soldier tells you it's not going to happen. Since you're SOG, though, they immediately respond with the helicopter."



Call of Duty: Black Ops

Unlike their last foray in the Call of Duty series, which dealt with the well-worn territory of World War II, Treyarch's next game spans across a number of U.S. military initiatives, including involvement in Cuba and the Vietnam War. Treyarch's Josh Olin provides vital intel on the "Slaughterhouse" mission set in Vietnam and explains the perks of being an elite SOG operative engaged in guerrilla warfare.

"This scene takes place in Hue city in Vietnam, from a mission appropriately titled 'Slaughterhouse.' You're not fighting the Battle of Hue city, but it's all going on around you. The player character, Mason, is sent in to gather intelligence from the MAC-V [Military Assistance Command-Vietnam] compound. You're part of an elite, CIA-backed black-ops unit called SOG, which stands for Studies and Observations Group. You have the ultimate trump card—you're the most important soldier on the playing field." ***—Josh Olin,*** *Treyarch community manager*

Though unproven as a studio, Eidos Montreal is well on its way toward creating a sequel deserving of the Deus Ex name.

Shuffled into to a large conference room just outside Eidos Montreal's fifth floor office, I immediately notice the tension among studio employees. Dozens of staffers line the back walls of the room, preparing to watch the first presentation of what many of them consider as "their baby" taking its first steps in front of the press.

Unlike other development-studio offices currently developing new installments of major franchises, the walls of Eidos Montreal are bare. You won't find awards for previous releases displayed under a thin sheet of glass. Release posters proudly branded with the developer's logo do not frame the studio's halls. And the source of the smiles scattered on employees throughout the office isn't the satisfaction of a job well done from crafting an exciting game that players around the globe enjoy.

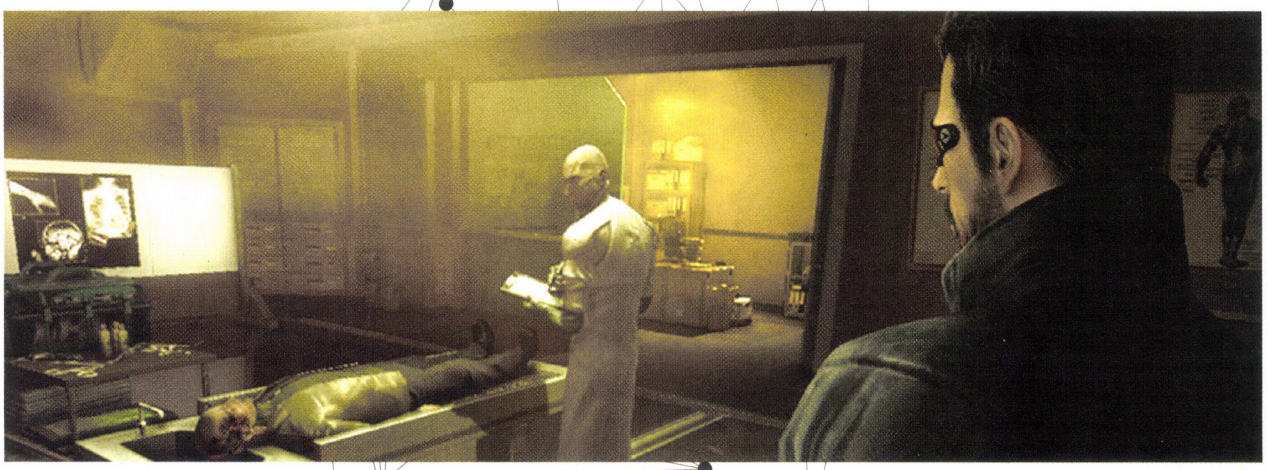
As a developer, Eidos Montreal is an unproven studio; it hasn't made a game since its establishment in 2007. Until now, Eidos has used the studio as the primary quality-assurance test bed for its recent releases, including Batman: Arkham Asylum and the upcoming Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days.

What the developer *does* have, though, is a plan for its untested team to develop new installments in two beloved gaming franchises: Thief and Deus Ex. Ask anyone on the team and they'll tell you this is no easy task. The first title in the studio's mission to breathe new life into classic franchises is Deus Ex: Human Revolution—the third in the famed cyberpunk series.

Opinions of the previous title in the franchise (Deus Ex: Invisible War) are divisive, and series fans have been vocal about their anger of the absence of Warren Spector—director of previous titles in the franchise—in the third Deus Ex installment. Some Internet denizens maintain no studio can do the franchise justice without Spector and former Lead Designer Harvey Smith at the helm.

"We understand this is enormous," Human Revolution Producer David Anfossi says of Spector's absence. "We've spent a lot of time playing the first two games trying to discover the recipe of the Deus Ex experience—trying to uncover the core pillars of the series." Anfossi explains that his team has great respect for the original titles and that they've taken steps to ensure Human Revolution will fit neatly into the world first unleashed on PC gamers in 2000 (and later that year on the Mac and PlayStation 2). The team's gone so far as to hire Sheldon Pacotti, the lead writer of previous Deus Ex titles, as a consultant on the project.

Deus Ex: Human Revolution isn't a franchise reboot in the same vein as Bethesda Softworks' Fallout 3; this is a new game designed to capture the core



experience found in previous installments of the franchise—with a few twists, that is.

Taking place in 2027, 52 years before the events in the original Deus Ex, Human Revolution is a vision of what our own society *could* become. In this universe, it's a time of great innovation, but some within the world feel the fascination with technology will lead mankind into chaos. The advanced society in Human Revolution is far from a utopia; conspiracy and fear fuel the world. Through mechanical augmentations, people can fuse technology with organic tissue; humanitarian organizations oppose such enhancements.

"This is a time of great social divide between flesh and machine," Narrative Designer Mary DeMarle explains. "In this timeframe, mechanical augmentations offer people the opportunity to break out of their molds, but not everyone believes this is morally correct." The use of augmentations comes at very high economic and moral costs, which further expands the divide between those with enhancements and those who oppose "playing God"...or simply cannot *afford* to become "special."

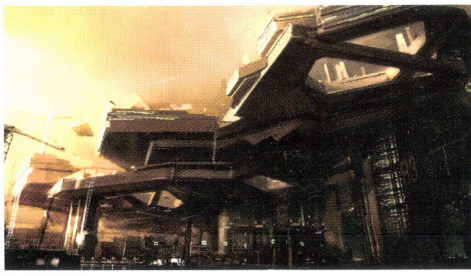
In the middle of this social divide, players take on the role of Adam Jensen, a private-security specialist for Sarif Industries, one of the largest augmentation corporations in the world. On the eve of historical hearings regarding the fate of mechanical enhancements, an augmented mercenary group known as Bell Tower attacks Sarif researchers. Jensen, who at this point possesses no augments and is undecided as to which side of the argument he's on, is caught in the attack and only survives after receiving an augmentation. While this allows him to live through the Bell Tower attack, circumstances outside of his control rob him of his humanity, adding a layer of tension and angst.

Though Jensen receives augmentations against his will, he benefits greatly from them. Jensen utilizes four core types of mechanical augmentations in Human Revolution: combat, stealth, hacking, and social. The primary augmentations center on combat and stealth, allowing players to continuously shift their upgrade focus to adjust their gameplay experience. "We want people to play the game the way *they* want to play it," Creative Director Jean-Francois Dugas explains.

Two core components form the gameplay's structure: social interactions and action experiences. Human Revolution's social interactions pull from ideas found in other role-playing games. Jensen's social skills influence

“We spent a lot of time playing the first two games trying to discover the recipe of the Deus Ex experience—trying to uncover the core pillars of the series.”

—David Anfossi,
Deus Ex: Human Revolution producer



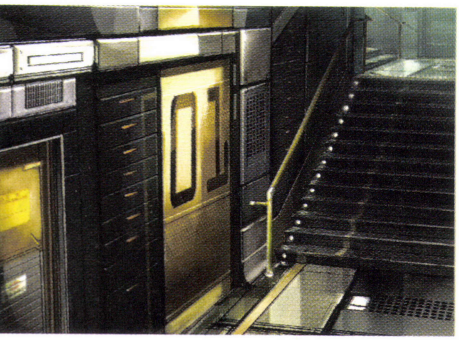
the outcomes of conversations, and augmentations can enhance these skills. If NPCs don't comply with his requests, Jensen can use bribery or violence to achieve his goals. According to Dugas, players won't simply be able to cull through a laundry list of canned responses until NPCs have nothing more to say. Players must make intelligent decisions during conversations, otherwise NPCs will shut down—but Dugas promises that the system will be forgiving.

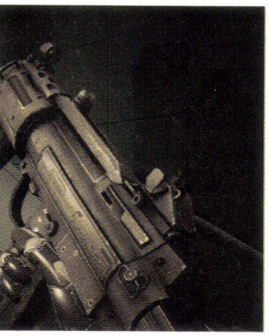
Throughout missions, Jensen can complete his primary goal in a number of ways. In the example I saw, a conversation gone awry with a bartender forces Jensen to find an alternate route into the backroom of a nightclub called The Hive, located just off the shores of Shanghai. Through the thick fog of booming audio—composed by Michael McCann of Splinter Cell: Double Agent fame—Jensen overhears a pair of guards discussing a different path, allowing him to proceed. Eavesdropping on the guards, Anfossi explains, is one of many ways that players can complete this particular objective.

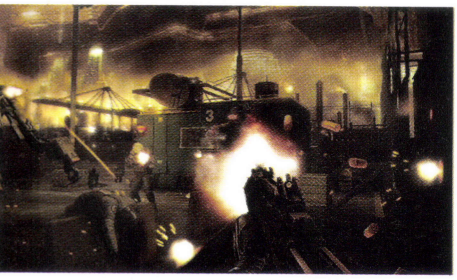
Hacking terminals provide another avenue for Jensen to make progress. Hacking augmentations allow him to more effectively break into computer terminals and other devices through the use of an interesting mini-game. Reminiscent of the gameplay featured in Introversion Software's cult-hit Uplink, the mini-game tasks players with bouncing a signal through multiple computer nodes to slow down a trace as they attempt to access a primary server.

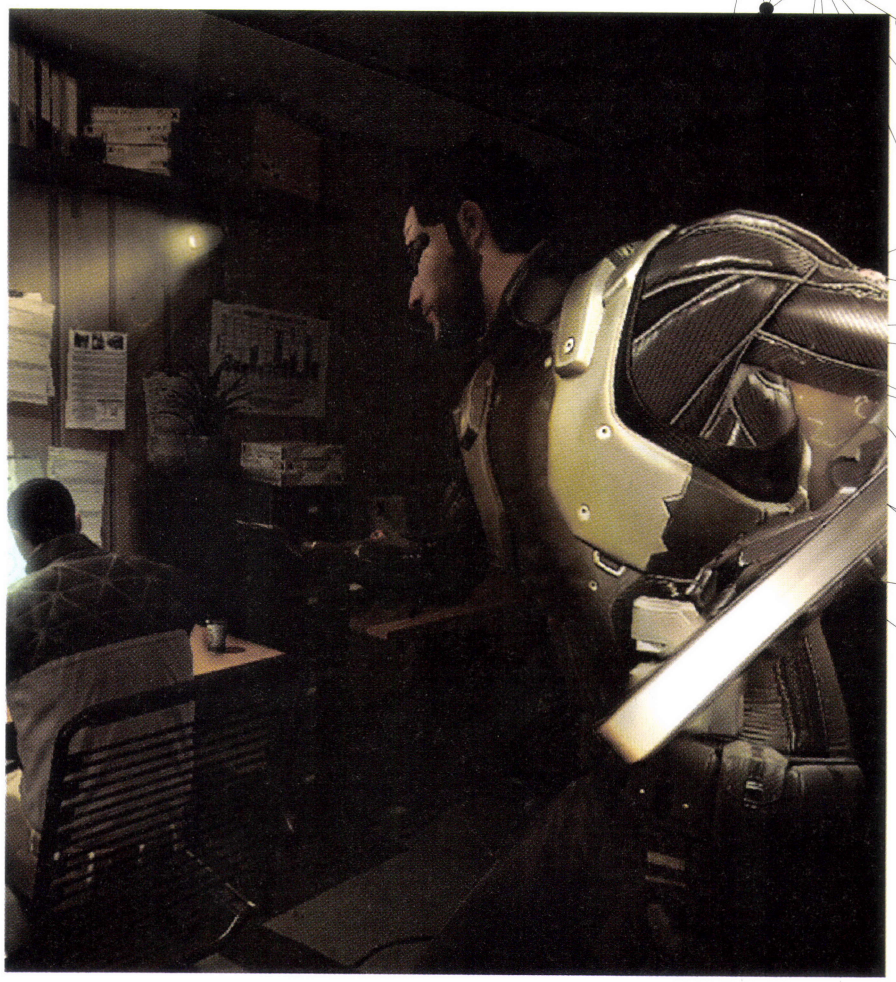
Breaking into computer systems and completing story objectives may sound drab to the action-oriented player, so Human Revolution has its fair share of combat as well. Like Rainbow Six: Vegas, the cover system in Human Revolution pulls out to a third-person perspective, allowing players to move quickly and quietly from cover points. Line of sight and sound determine enemy awareness, so hiding bodies and focusing on melee takedowns or silenced weapons will be essential for stealth-oriented players. According to Dugas, it's possible to complete Jensen's journey without killing a single enemy—save for the game's bosses.

The balance for Human Revolution lies in keeping Jensen's arsenal as interesting to use as his augmentations. In one sequence, a giant cube falls into a warehouse that Jensen is in. After a few seconds of electronic buzzing, the cube transforms into a menacing mech dead-set on halting Jensen's progress. After firing a number of common first-person-shooter weapons at the mech, Jensen grabs a









nearby rocket launcher and upgrades it with a heat-seeking capability. Weapons have four basic upgrades (which you implement separately from augmentations), and you can enhance certain weapons even further. With the heat-seeking rocket launcher in tow, Jensen cuts short the mech's rein of terror.

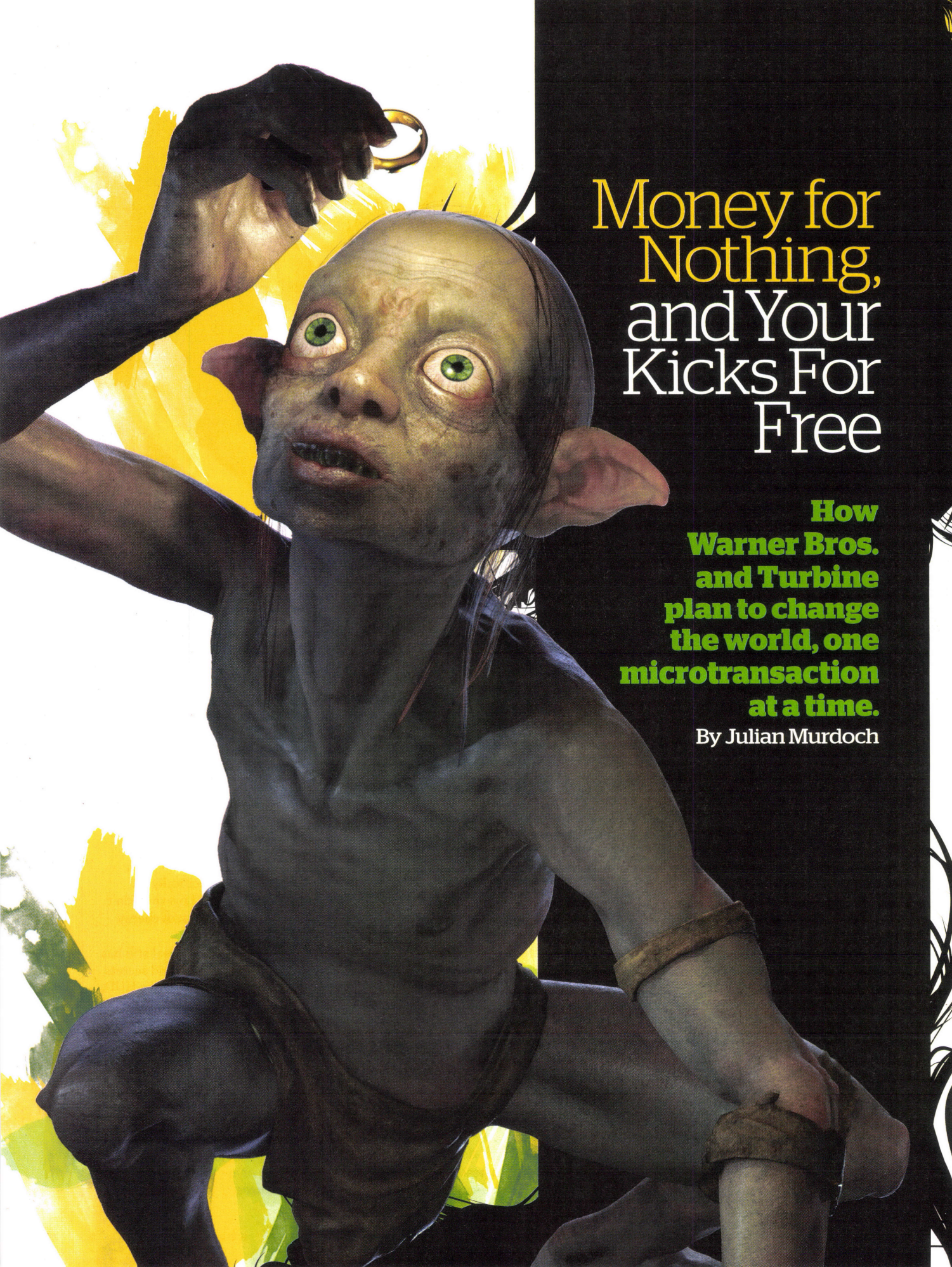
This scene is exhilarating because of the scenario leading up to it; augmentations, however, appear to be far more exciting. During an earlier sequence, Jensen falls through a skylight in the middle of four heavily armed guards. Before the team has time to react, Jensen activates a personal claymore augmentation, which fires dozens of small bombs out of his body, destroying all breakable objects (and laying waste to any nearby guards) within the effect's radius.

Augmentation is certainly a cornerstone of Human Revolution, but the team has made a considerable effort to ensure that the world these modified humans reside in is not only beautiful but believable. The game's art direction bathes the entire world in a black-and-gold color palette, making other colors immediately pop into focus. Art Director Jonathan Jacques Belletete says the idea is to mesh the cyberpunk atmosphere from previous games with Renaissance architecture and fashion from the 14th to 17th centuries. Areas in this "cyber Renaissance" style insert futuristic technology amid the noise and clutter of the classic European style. The goal, Belletete says, is for players to look at a screenshot from Deus Ex: Human Revolution and be able to immediately identify its origin.

Our demo, however, does not illustrate this style. Instead, I see areas heavily bathed in product branding, and the deep, ultrasaturated colors of the neon advertisements are immediately reminiscent of the futuristic cityscapes in Ridley Scott's classic sci-fi film, *Blade Runner*. The team created the brands specifically for Human Revolution, so fans shouldn't worry about the inclusion of cheesy product placements.

The team at Eidos Montreal still has a great deal of work ahead and secrets to disclose, including the game's HUD, which Anfossi says the they aren't ready to reveal. Although the studio is unproven as a development house, an appropriate amount of adoration and respect for the franchise is in play. While the team is anxious about remaining faithful to the universe and giving fans a title deserving of the title—they also want to ensure that the fledgling studio's first "test" title is a memorable one.

—Xav de Matos



Money for Nothing, and Your Kicks For Free

How Warner Bros. and Turbine plan to change the world, one microtransaction at a time.

By Julian Murdoch

Turbine's offices in Westwood, Massachusetts are not pretty. CEO Jim Crowley, without a hint of humor, shakes my hand and apologizes for it. "It's actually not a great environment for, you know, people," he says. It's a converted warehouse, and most of the employees choose to work in the dark rather than turn on the overhead lights, turning the entire 300-person facility into nothing so much as a rabbit warren: stuffy, dark, and vaguely earthen. It's difficult, then, to believe that the world of MMOs, and possibly video games in general, is being turned on its head here.

The April announcement of Warner Bros. acquiring independent Turbine was hardly shocking. Venture-capital backed since before the dotcom boom, Turbine had been rumored to be looking for suitors and a liquidity event for its investors for a year. Warner, on the other hand, has been on an acquisition binge, gobbling up Monolith (F.E.A.R.), Snowblind (Champions of Norrath, the upcoming The Lord of the Rings role-playing game, War in the North), Rocksteady (Batman: Arkham Asylum), Telltale Games (Lego You-Name-It) and scooping up faltering Midway along the way. Turbine could simply be another feather in Warner's cap.

The PR spin surrounding the deal has been standard fare, but this acquisition is different—and it's smarter. Not only is Turbine the only developer of persistent worlds in the mix, but as of June, they're also the only developer in Warner's portfolio giving their games away for free.

In September 2009, Turbine's Dungeons & Dragons Online abandoned the pure subscription model for a hybrid model focused squarely on microtransactions. Much of the content became free-to-play. Individual dungeons, content expansions, and an endless list of consumables and upgrades became available through an in-game storefront, while a monthly subscription offering blends the old "everything's unlocked" model with a new "buy it when you need it" mentality.

And now, Turbine's crown jewel, The Lord of the Rings Online, is following suit. And Warner couldn't be happier.

"We believe that the free-to-play model is a superior financial model," says Martin Tremblay, president of Warner Interactive. And they put their money where their mouth is. The acquisition of Turbine is rumored to be worth more than $160 million, with incentives for performance included.

One hundred and sixty million dollars for a company that just decided to give away their best game.

THE RISE OF "FREE-TO-PLAY"

To understand the genesis of the "free-to-play" revolution that's taken over Turbine, it's important to know the most prominent husband-and-wife

> I remember five years ago taking the temperature of the roo m on microtransactions in an executive meeting. And the reaction—even my reaction—was 'over my dead body—we're not going to cheapen this game.'"
>
> ***—Fernando Paiz, executive producer of The Lord of the Rings Online and Dungeons & Dragons Online***

team in game design, Kate and Fernando Paiz. As executive producers of The Lord of the Rings Online and Dungeons & Dragons Online, respectively, they're directly responsible for morphing the shape of Turbine's games—and quite possibly the future of the MMO industry. It all started with There.com.

There.com was an early virtual world along the lines of Second Life focused on microtransactions. It shuttered this March. "There.com was too early. It was breaking ground and wasn't mature," Kate Paiz says. And when the couple migrated to Turbine, it wasn't to bring a There.com model to Turbine—it was to get away from it. "It's ironic that all our executive producers came from There.com," Fernando Paiz admits. "When we started here, we were doing nothing with microtransactions."

It's not that the topic never came up—MMO developers are keenly aware that the biggest problem in their business is convincing people to pay $15 a month. It just didn't feel right. "I remember five years ago taking the temperature of the room on microtransactions in an executive meeting," Fernando Paiz recalls. "And the reaction—even my reaction—was 'over my dead body—we're not going to cheapen this game.' We weren't ready, and neither was the consumer."

But do microtransactions "cheapen" a game?

THE DDO SUCCESS STORY

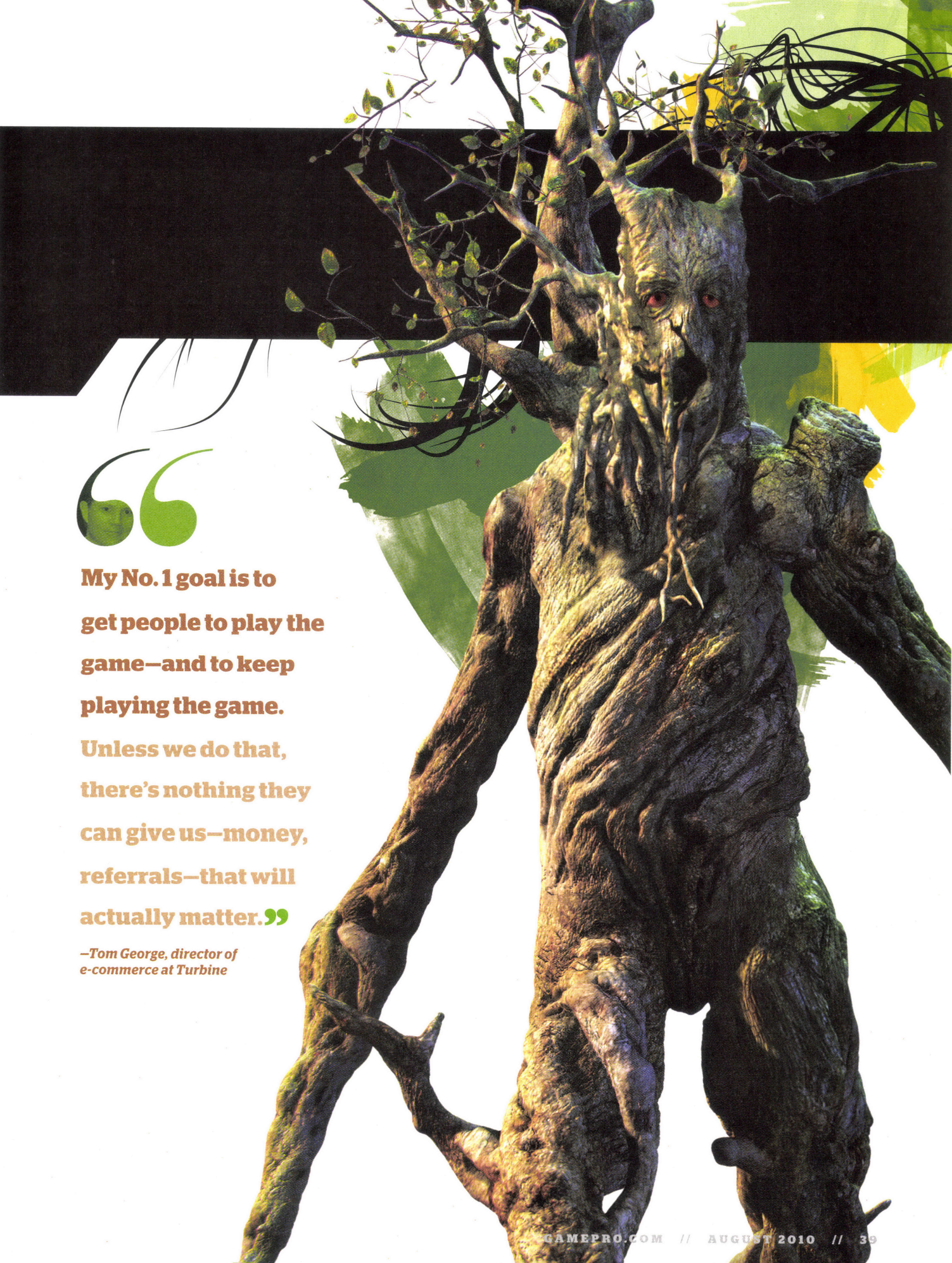
Fernando Paiz, who was at the helm for Dungeons & Dragons Online's change in business model, was keenly focused on not ruining the game he and his wife had helped craft. Critically, the power level and balance impact of in-store items is constantly scrutinized. The man behind that scrutinizing is Tom George, Turbine's director of e-commerce. In most MMO companies, he'd be in charge of selling the occasional upgrade pack and a bunch of T-shirts. At Turbine, he's the gateway for what is now the core revenue stream for the company—selling Turbine Points, and getting players to spend those points in game.

"My No. 1 goal is to get people to play the game—and to keep playing the game," George says. "Unless we do that, there's nothing they can give us—money, referrals—that will actually matter." There's a subtle difference between Tom's focus and that of someone at a traditional MMO, though. While Dungeons & Dragons Online still has plenty of subscribers—many of them lifetime subscribers—what they get for their money is a stipend of Turbine Points along with a package of perks like storage and content that nonsubscribers have to buy à la carte. "The nature of MMOs historically has been that they're designed to keep you playing longer, because you need to put in time for a monthly subscription. To have you grind and grind, because you need to subscribe month to month."

With a hybrid model, it's far easier for players to jump in and out of the game from month to month, without feeling the pressure of justifying a monthly expense. "In the real world, it's hard to get a group together," says Adam Mersky, Turbine's head of communications and community relations. "If I can drop $5 on an evening to avoid the pain points and get one good evening of play, that's important."

Perhaps most important, Turbine isn't turning their games into "he with the most cash wins" fests either. For the most part, everything available in the store is available through other means in the game, and players can earn Turbine Points through game activities. It will be entirely possible to experience the entire epic storyline of the original The Lord of the Rings Online content, and hit the level cap, without spending a dime.

"We're bringing the North American cultural gamer view to this," Fernando Paiz explains. "So that's why we focus on



My No. 1 goal is to get people to play the game—and to keep playing the game. Unless we do that, there's nothing they can give us—money, referrals—that will actually matter."

—Tom George, director of e-commerce at Turbine

"Turbine has a clear merchandising platform that can be used across our entire portfolio of games. It can be used for a Batman game, for other Lord of the Rings games, for a Harry Potter game, or even for the F.E.A.R. franchise."

–Martin Tremblay, president of Warner Interactive.

things like paying for content. I pay three bucks to buy Rock Band songs all the time. That's way better than having to buy magic rock-out juice to win at high-level Rock Band."

When DDO went free-to-play, it was a risky move. Many industry observers saw it as a desperation play, to breathe life into a flagging franchise. Even Turbine had reservations. While not boasting millions of subscribers, a substantial player base was paying a monthly subscription. Seeing what they'd been paying for suddenly open to the unwashed masses was a big concern. "We were prepared for losing a big chunk when we announced," says Mersky. "But we didn't."

Instead what happened is unprecedented for a 4-year-old MMO—the population more than doubled. According to industry watcher NPD, Dungeons & Dragons Online market penetration doubled in 2009, from 4 percent to 8 percent, and DDO only went free in September. More impressively, DDO added 2 million new players, reacquired 20 percent of its former players who had left the game, and doubled the number of monthly subscribers—now called "VIPs."

And the nature of the player base has shifted as well. DDO's average player age dropped by a decade. In the PC gaming market—one which has been chronically aging—that's a big deal.

And what are all those people buying? Time.

A quick look at DDO's best sellers shows people looking to level up a bit faster, not die in dungeons, and get better loot. The items in question—potions, scrolls, tomes—are generally fairly minor in game terms. They're conveniences that streamline the process, rather than upset the carefully constructed skinner-box of challenge, repetition, reward, and reinforcement that drives all MMOs.

"There are just inherent pain points in MMOs that get in the way of your entertainment," George explains. "Sometimes that's just not having enough money to subscribe, or maybe it's not having enough time to craft to get the things in the game you'd really like, or to go on raids for certain loot...we can monetize around those pain points."

Monetizing around pain points? George's office is stacked with charts and tables, showing exactly what types of players are buying what items from the store, plans for new pricing schemes, and package deals. It's clear to me that in George's office a strange and emergent science is under practice, one that is intimately dependent on, but fundamentally different from, designing good games.

It's that science that has driven monthly revenues for Dungeons & Dragons Online up 500 percent in a matter of months.

Is it any wonder that The Lord of the Rings Online is following suit, or that Tremblay's eyebrows were raised in Spock-like interest?

THE LONG VIEW

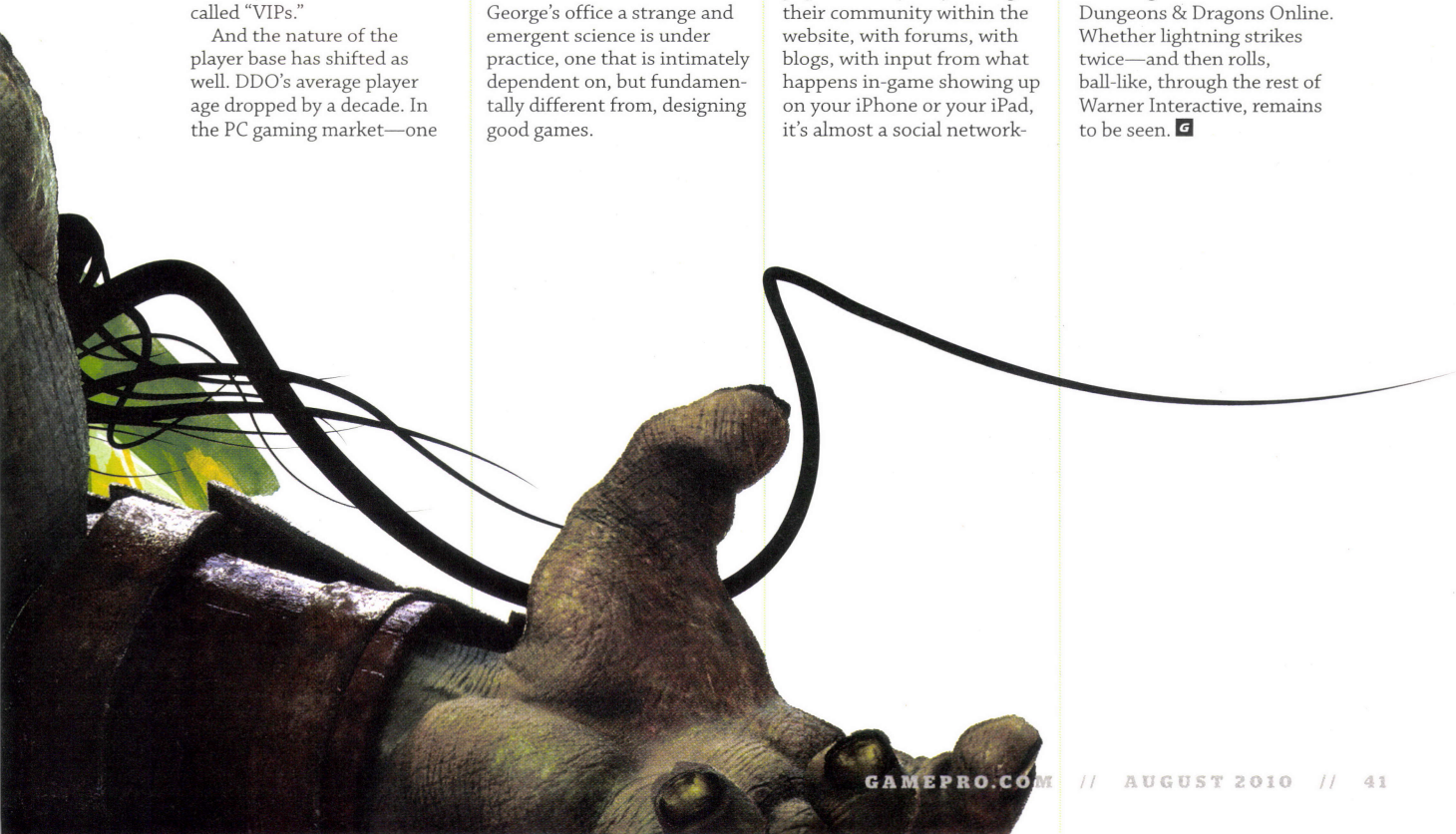
For Tremblay, Turbine's success with a hybrid microtransaction model isn't just about making the next big MMO out of juicy Warner Bros. IP. It's about changing the way they do business. "Turbine has a clear merchandising platform that can be used across our entire portfolio of games," Tremblay suggests. When pressed, he refuses to close off any avenues. "It can be used for a Batman game, for other LOTR games, for a Harry Potter game, or even for the F.E.A.R. franchise." Care to pay by the bullet? It might be in your future.

Tremblay, and indeed the Turbinites we talked to, are quick to point out that "Turbine Way" of doing business is about more than just setting up a store to sell healing potions for pennies a pop. "The way they manage their community within the website, with forums, with blogs, with input from what happens in-game showing up on your iPhone or your iPad, it's almost a social networking approach to gaming," he explains. "It's not just e-commerce, with a store, but it's also managing and understanding their community. Nobody else is doing it like Turbine at the moment."

What's clear is that the move toward free-to-play and Warner's acquisition is far from coincidental; it's the whole reason for the transaction. Crowley, Tremblay's counterpart at Turbine, put it plainly. "People naturally have to draw a correlation between the Warner deal and our move to free-to-play. I think it's a strong recognition of the importance of these new business models."

Crowley pauses, looking around his office for what may be one of the last times—the company is moving out of the human-hostile converted warehouse they've been in for years into a larger facility actually designed for, you know, people. It's a move that will be a bit more lavish now that Warner is paying the rent. "This isn't anomalous. This is a significant and fundamental change in the ecosystem."

It's a bold claim, but it's impossible to argue with the stunning rebound of Dungeons & Dragons Online. Whether lightning strikes twice—and then rolls, ball-like, through the rest of Warner Interactive, remains to be seen.



DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

Taking the Long Road

Sitting down to play DC Universe Online at Sony Online Entertainment's office in Austin, Texas, I'm almost as anxious as the developers to see where the game stands in development. Two years is a long time to go without seeing anything new from a game, and after all of the drama surrounding Marvel Comics' MMO efforts (see sidebar, "A History of Superhero MMOs"), I feared DC would die in development—drowned by licensing complications and market pressure from City of Heroes and Champions Online.

STORY BY AJ GLASSER

A HISTORY OF DC COMICS

From the premier issue of Action Comics and Superman's debut to the recent comeback of Aquaman, we recap a brief history of DC Comics. ***—Max Morey***

1938: The Golden Age
Detective Comics, Inc. (now known as DC Comics) publishes *Action Comics #1*, bringing to life a new hero created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster: Superman. Within two years, Batman, Wonder Woman, the Flash, and dozens of other heroes join Superman in taking over newsstands.

1940: The DC Universe Develops
With *All Star Comics #3* and the formation of the first hero team, the Justice Society of America, the notion that all DC heroes exist in the same universe begins to jell.

1956: The Silver Age
Thanks to the post–World War II lull and a public crusade against the medium in the 1950s, the popularity of comics is at an all-time low. The heads of DC decide to reinvent many of their top-tier characters with a more science fiction–based approach, starting with The Flash in *Showcase #4*. Most comic historians mark this as the beginning of the Silver Age. Soon DC re-creates Green Lantern, Hawkman, and many others in this style. The formation of the Justice League of America in 1960 further solidifies this resurgence.

1961: Flash of Two Worlds
The reinvention of numerous heroes causes confusion with readers, as many remember the classic versions and wonder what happened to them when their replacements show up. To remedy this, the Silver Age Flash accidentally transports himself to another Earth and encounters his Golden Age counterpart in *Flash #123*, subsequently discovering what comes to be known as Earth-Two. The distinction that the Golden Age stories take place in another universe creates the DC multiverse, where an infinite number of alternate worlds and heroes exist.

1985: The Infinite Earths in Crisis
In the years that follow the birth of the Golden Age, the multiverse expands to such a degree that many readers find DC Comics and their heroes held back by too many concurrent storylines to keep up with. As a way to appease fans, an epic crossover emerges called *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. After a series of catastrophic events and the destruction of entire dimensions, DC pares down to one Earth and

Continued on page 46

It takes two fights in one dungeon before I understand why it's taking DCUO so long to reach release: This game isn't really an MMO. It's not an action game, either, strictly speaking. Both the developers and I have difficulty articulating exactly what it is, beyond saying "DCUO is DCUO." It is its own thing—a hybrid of game types that hasn't successfully existed before now. When you're covering new ground like this, the best path is usually the long one.

I'm on the floor of a giant demo theater with a PlayStation 3 controller in my hands and a screen in front of me. DCUO Creative Director Jens Andersen sits beside me and explains the basic controls: X for quick attacks, Triangle for a knockback attack, and the right or left trigger to access superpowers stored in a hotkey tray on the bottom of the screen. He tells me that I'm playing a good-aligned character inspired by Batman with a lot of points put into the Acrobatics and Gadgets skills. I also have a glowing sword and a metallic face that reminds me of Destro from *G.I. Joe*.

SOE isn't ready to explain a lot of things about DCUO yet—like DC Comics Copublisher Jim Lee's story behind how or why a bunch of new superheroes suddenly show up in DC continuity, or why all of the bad guys are more or less unchecked in Gotham and Metropolis—but the character-creation system is pretty straightforward. Right from the start, you choose to be a good guy or a bad guy, a superhero or supervillain as "inspiration" for your character, and one of three superhero types (tech, magic, or meta—as in metahuman, such as Superman). Based on your alignment and type, the game gives you a DC hero or villain as a sort of tutor and chooses your city of origin.

The game loads into a Gotham City level set in The Joker's theme park, Amusement Mile. Game Director Chris Cao explains that this is the last section of an episode where the game breaks off from the open-world MMO and goes into a single-player area (known to MMO gamers as an instanced dungeon) where players often pursue a boss fight solo. He adds that one-fourth of most episodes carry these "solo instances" to provide players with their own slice of the story, emphasizing the intimate journey toward becoming a true superhero (or supervillain). In this episode, Harley Quinn is up to no good, and she retreats into Joker's funhouse. Tim Drake Robin goes after her, and presumably, he falls into Harley's clutches (getting captured is what he does best), and Batman sends the player into Amusement Mile to find out what happened.

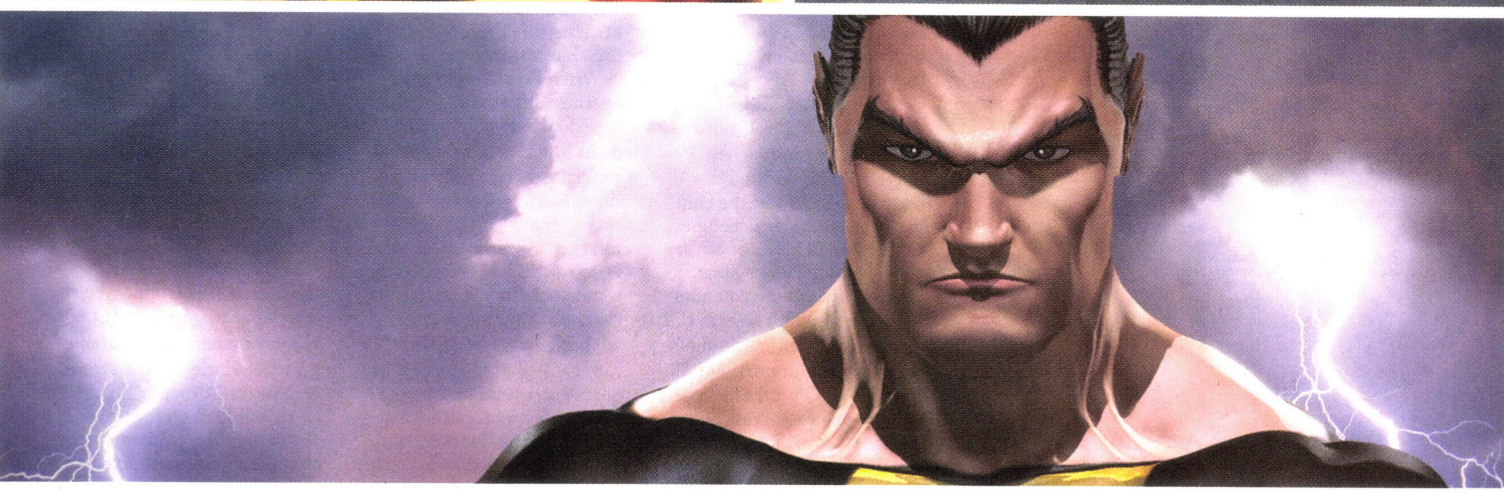
Playing the game shows you what DCUO is all about. Like an MMO, it's massive in scale, calls for multitudes of players, and is an online-only game; like an action game, the combat is immediate and responsive. Combining the two elements together, however, sets DCUO apart from both traditional MMOs and action games. The part where it's on the PS3 compounds the alien factor.

"I chose to do this game for two reasons," Cao says. "The first was because it's a superhero game that's [also an] MMO, and second because it's going to be on the PS3."

These things are important to the veteran EverQuest II developer because he knows that nobody's really launched a thriving MMO on a console before. Sure, EverQuest: Online Adventures and Final Fantasy XI enjoyed some success on the PlayStation 2 and Xbox 360, but console gamers didn't latch on because even though these were on consoles, they were still turn-based fantasy games. Cao says that's *not* what console gamers really want.

"With superheroes, there's a breadth of [genres] you can have," he says. "You can have an action game where everything's huge and over-the-top, which is a great first impression for a console gamer.

"But console gamers have heard all these [bad] things about MMOs, right? They've heard that they take too much time, cost too much money, are too hard, or are just boring. I wanted to go up to a console gamer and say, 'You get to actually be a superhero, have that intense action and combat right from the beginning,' and marketing spiel aside, that's a unique experience. When I play a really great Superman or Batman game on a console, I get an experience that's focused on that character, but I don't get to make my own Batman; I don't get to invent my own hero; and I don't get to live in a world with my friends. All



symbolizes the end of the multiverse with the death of the Silver Age Flash. This is seen as a clean slate for the heroes, as most receive a new origin in hopes of being more reader-friendly.

1986: Grim and Gritty
Thanks to two of DC's seminal works, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen*, the company's comics take on a darker, grittier tone. Batman in particular becomes much more of a loner, and he continues to mature as a character when his sidekick, Robin, dies.

1992: The Casualties of the Market
As comics enter its biggest boom in decades, DC makes drastic changes to their heroes, beginning with the death (and eventual rebirth) of Superman. The crippling of Batman follows, along with the replacement of other heroes, including Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, and Green Arrow. This culminates in 1994 with another massive crossover, *Zero Hour: Crisis in Time*, which seeks to smooth out the many continuity irregularities of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. Bait-and-switch tactics such as Superman's death, along with an extreme oversaturation of subpar comics, causes a massive crash in the market. It takes the industry a decade to recover.

2005: Crisis Begins Again
DC gradually reverses many of the changes introduced in the '90s, including the return of Silver Age Green Lantern and Green Arrow. They redefine the DC universe for the Modern Age. DC picks up dangling plot threads from *Crisis on Infinite Earths* and expands them in *Infinite Crisis*. Golden Age Superman returns in an attempt to fix all of the problems of the past two decades of stories. The current heroes save not only Earth but help spark the multiverse's re-creation.

2008: The Final Crisis (for Now)
With the *Final Crisis* miniseries, DC solidifies the existence of the multiverse. Silver Age Flash returns from the dead to mark this new age. Meanwhile, other heroes prove their worth by saving Earth

2010: In Brightest Day
Following the end of crossover *Blackest Night*, featuring Silver Age Green Lantern and Flash in key roles, DC enters its Brightest Day. This triggers the return of many major Silver Age heroes absent in recent years, including Martian Manhunter, Hawkman, and Aquaman. DC uses this combination of classic heroes and modern storytelling to propel their multiverse into the future.

of those things are why we're different and why I originally started this game.

"It's great to be able to play alongside other people, but I want to do it as a superhero, and I want that level of action. The development challenges of working on DC Universe Online take a significant amount of time, but we have something unique. To me, this is something that people haven't played before."

It's true—I haven't. I've played City of Heroes and Champions Online, and both of those games are vastly different from World of Warcraft or EverQuest—but they're what Cao calls "sped up, dressed up" MMOs that only made animations faster and particle effects prettier. They didn't actually make combat faster, and they didn't develop technology that would support server-client gameplay (where the game exists on developer servers and runs on gamers' computers) that lets my character lift a car in DC Universe while playing in New York and throw it to my friend playing in Los Angeles.

And no other MMO has ever really felt like a console game to me—even when ported to one. I blame the control scheme and the combat in those cases; developers can invent all kinds of hotkey shortcuts for PS3 or Xbox 360 controls where you map all of the function keys to the directional pad and the shoulder buttons, but porting PC controls just doesn't feel right to someone raised on analog sticks and face buttons. And you can forget chat windows.

DC Universe Online gets this. PS3 development started on day one roughly five years ago under SOE Vice President of Development John Blakely's guidance and never flagged, even when hardware limitations forced them to make tradeoffs. For SOE, the game had to work on PS3 via the PlayStation Network at all stages of development. "If we hadn't done that," Blakely says, "we might've been in a similar situation as Champions." (See "A History of Superhero MMOs.")

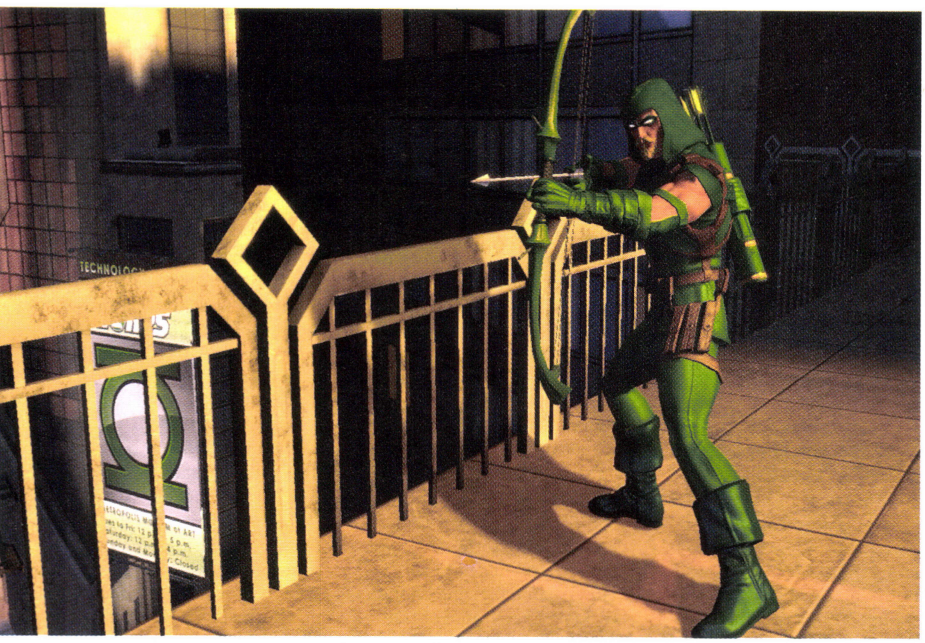
The PS3 controls feel natural. I push the left analog stick forward, and my character jogs ahead. Clicking in the stick sends him into acrobatics mode, where he runs faster and climbs up any part of the environment. Pressing X in acrobatics mode makes him jump, and holding it down allows him to glide. The right stick controls the camera, as it would in most action games, and the directional pad zooms the camera out for a more traditional MMO view or in for a comfortable action view.

When I reach a group of enemies, my first instinct is to do what you normally do in MMOs—access the superpower tray and hit them with a debuff or an area effect "spell." DCUO moves too fast, however, and before I can squeeze L2 to bring up the face button shortcut, the cluster of thugs is on me. I fall back on traditional action gameplay, mashing X in quick succession and tapping Triangle every so often. The game rewards this behavior with combos that inflict damage and knock down enemies, serving the traditional MMO combat theory of crowd control. With the enemies down, I now have time to access the tray and follow up my physical attack with something "super"—like a power called "encasement" that trap enemies temporarily in an energy ball you can pick up and throw at other enemies.

The pace of the combat and the feedback from the enemies is more akin to God of War than World of Warcraft—and with good reason. Joining SOE as an art director, veteran God of War developer Mark Anderson works very closely with the combat team so that the game not only looks Jim Lee–style great but also functions Kratos-style smooth.

"We've taken a lot of risks with combat in terms of having something that feels good, is visceral, and gives you the superhero experience on a moment-to-moment level and not just the typical [MMO] power-stacking," Anderson says. "I don't think MMOs and action games are *that* different in terms of how they approach things, but the pacing is very, very different."

He explains that a big part of getting combat right in DCUO was choosing when to be an MMO and when to be an action game in combat encounters. The server handles the physics, not the client, which allows the developer to govern what happens when your character punches Harley in the stomach. In traditional MMOs, an invisible die roll within the server determines if your character's fist connected and



A HISTORY OF SUPERHERO MMOS

A look back at the tumultuous 10-year history of superhero-themed MMOs. —***Max Morey***

2001: Cryptic Studios announces City of Heroes, the first major superhero MMO. They hope to release it within a year.

2002: Cryptic signs a publishing deal with Korean MMO company NCsoft for City of Heroes.

2003: Sony Online Entertainment makes their first console MMO, EverQuest Online Adventures for the PlayStation 2. SOE follows with three more PS2 games.

2004: NCsoft and Cryptic launch City of Heroes in April. Critics praise its casual approach to MMOs. It quickly becomes one of NCsoft's most popular games in the U.S. Marvel Comics sues both companies, claiming that the character-creation system leads to IP infringement.

2005: Cryptic launches City of Villains, a "sequel" to City of Heroes. Players can now make villains and battle heroes online in player-versus-player matches. Marvel reaches an undisclosed settlement with Cryptic and NCsoft.

2006: Marvel Comics works with Cryptic on a new MMO. Microsoft plans to release it for Xbox 360 and PC. SOE puts out their first PlayStation 3 title, Untold Legends, as rumors spread of a partnership with DC.

2007: Cryptic sells their share of City of Heroes/Villains to NCsoft. Cryptic can now presumably focus on the Marvel MMO.

2008: Microsoft officially cancels the Marvel MMO, and Cryptic purchases the rights to tabletop superhero RPG Champions. They intend to release it for both Xbox 360 and PC in '09. Meanwhile, Sony unveils DC Universe Online at E3.

2009: Comic conventions host early playable PS3 and PC versions of DC Universe Online. Cryptic debuts Champions Online with publisher Atari to positive reviews. Microsoft cancels the 360 version. Marvel signs with Gazillion Entertainment to create MMOs based on their comics for the next decade.

2010: Many speculate that City of Heroes 2 is in the works. Gazillion unveils their Marvel MMO, Marvel Superhero Squad, which is based on a children's cartoon. SOE continues the buildup to a planned late 2010 release for DC Universe Online.

how many hit points it cost Harley—in an action game, the physics engine knows whether or not your attack connected and deducts a flat rate of HP per hit. Anderson says they had to be careful not to breed unpredictability in combat by going back and forth between the rulesets. By providing visual feedback, you feel it when you hit something and feel it when you miss because Harley's temporarily invincible while spinning around the room with a mallet.

"[Our combat] isn't something that you typically see in MMOs." Anderson says. "[What you typically see is] I swing; I saw my animation; and the numbers go up, so I know that I hit something. But I don't really get a response from that other than the minor offensive visuals going off.

"We've done a lot in terms of animations and effects to make it feel like somebody has a real visceral response to hitting someone, knocking them back, and seeing them reel back from the blow a bit. We feel that's part of selling the superhero experience."

The longest part of DCUO's journey is DC itself—not just on the licensing side, but on the fan side as well. Cao, Anderson, and Blakely all name Lee as their hero in getting DC on board with the game. Not only can Lee "wave his hand and make continuity," but he's also a legend among comic-book fans and carries enough clout at DC that he can go to bat with them on behalf of the developers to overcome licensing challenges that other superhero MMOs stumbled over.

Take, for example, character logos. SOE wanted to reward hardcore players with a top-tier suit of Batman- or Superman-branded armor to wear in the game and during player-versus-player matches so your friends know how hardcore you are. DC Comics, however, didn't want the logos to appear on anybody but Batman or Superman.

"People want to earn the accolades of these characters," Cao says. "When you stand there in that complete set [of logoed armor], that's when you really feel part of the DC Universe. When I have the 'S' on my chest, it's not because I'm pretending to be Superman—it's because Superman trusts me enough to sport the symbol of the house of a planet that's now long gone. Each of these symbols mean far more than just an iconic logo. We make that clear through story, and with Jim's help we overcame what was originally a big 'no-no' [with DC Comics]."

Additionally, Lee knows the DC lore well enough to understand how to introduce it to gamers who aren't necessarily familiar with the comics. Lee says it was a balancing act to get the story of the game in line with the comics "without being a slave to it."

"We feel DC Universe Online is not just for comic book fans but also for casual gamers who know the characters through the movies or cartoons," Lee says. "We really wanted to present the DC universe in its virginal, ideal state. Bruce Wayne is Batman, and Clark Kent works at the Daily Planet. In the comics that might change, but we really want it to mesh with what people expect the DC universe to be even if they've only read a couple comics in their lifetime. After that, we're free to craft story lines in the game that mirror what's going on in the comics, but we really wanted to launch with the ideal state of the DC universe and have all the key characters that fans know and love."

I finish my episode of DC Universe Online with Robin free (and ungrateful) and Harley Quinn locked up in Arkham Asylum—a place Batman-centric characters visit in their final leg of the journey toward membership in the Justice League of America. With my episode concluded, I sit back and watch Senior Producer Wes Yanagi run through a magic-aligned quest in order for me to check out my favorite DC character, Zatanna Zatara, sporting her fishnet tights. Even though she doesn't have her top hat, even though the level is prealpha, and even though SOE still isn't sure if it's going to charge a subscription fee to play the game, just the thrill of seeing my favorite character and a console control scheme that *works* is enough to convince me that however long it takes, this game is going to make it. It may be another year in the making (in my worst-case scenario), but DC Universe Online is more than halfway down the long road.

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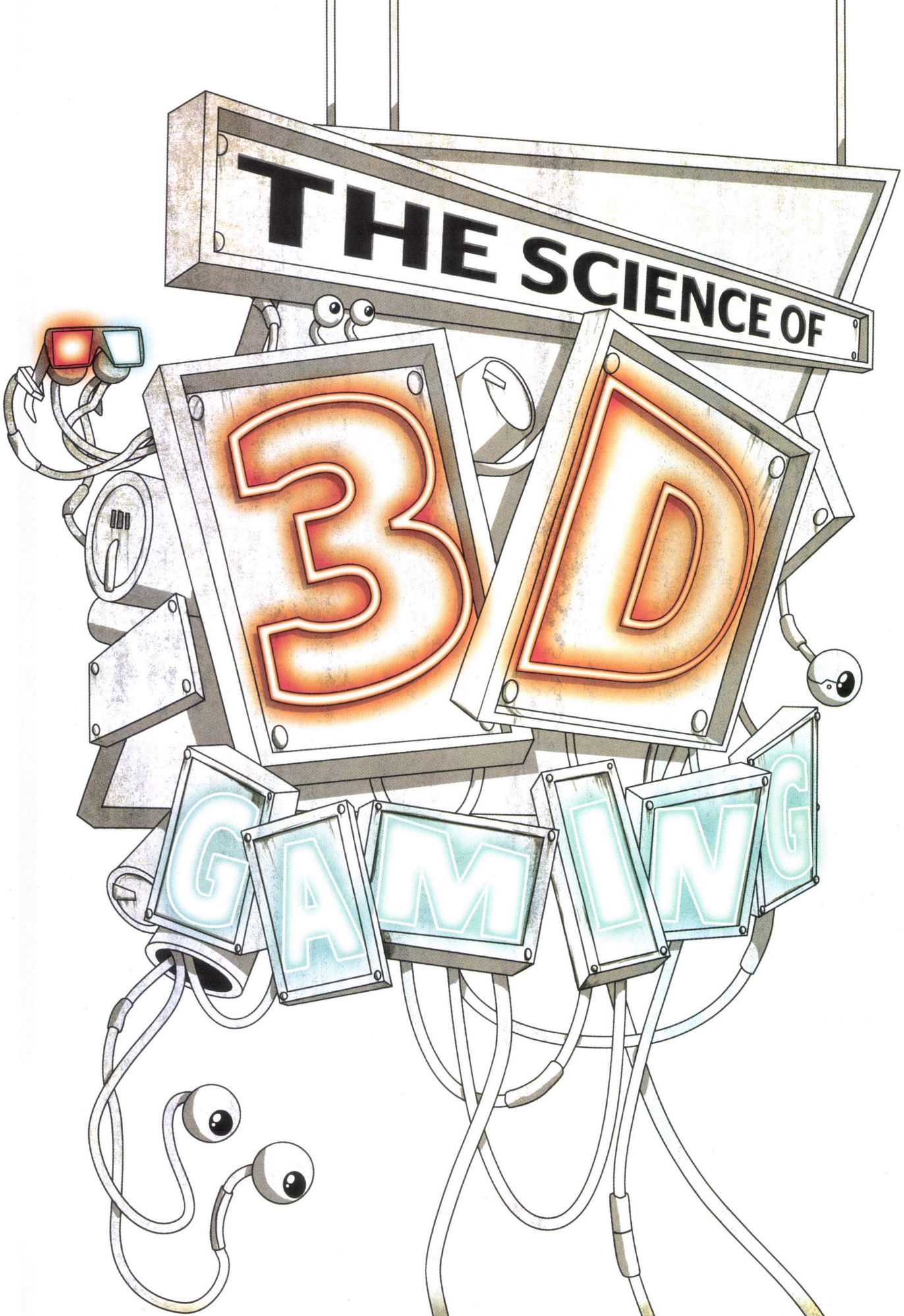
THE SCIENCE OF
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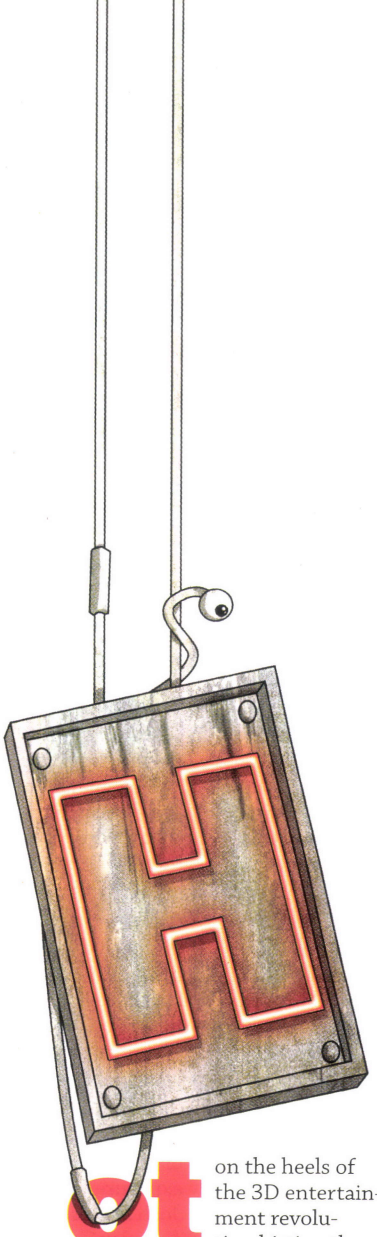


WITH THE HELP OF LEADING EXPERTS IN OPTICAL SCIENCE AND 3D TECHNOLOGY, WE EXAMINE THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF 3D VIDEO GAMES, INCLUDING HOW IT WORKS AND WHAT IT ULTIMATELY MEANS FOR GAMERS.

STORY BY
ANDREW GROEN

ILLUSTRATION BY
ANDREW YANG

Not on the heels of the 3D entertainment revolution hitting the film industry full force—with everything from the next *Jackass* movie to a Kenny Chesney concert coming to theaters in 3D—it's clear that video games are the next step.

Just as 3D films are quickly becoming more prevalent at the box office, the 3D craze is approaching the video-game industry with equal momentum. First-party companies like Sony and Microsoft, as well as third-party developers like EA, are already embracing the technology for gaming, and Nintendo is even rolling out a 3D gaming handheld, the 3DS.

While few doubt that the role of 3D in gamers' lives is growing, it's not clear what exactly this means for the industry as well as for players. James Cameron's record-shattering 3D science-fiction film *Avatar* is just shy of 3 hours long, and some moviegoers complained about side effects from watching it in 3D, from minor discomfort to severe headaches. So what happens to your eyes—not to mention your brain—after prolonged exposure during a 6-hour binge of Halo in 3D? In addition to examining how 3D works in games and its imminent revolution, we ask experts about the possible harmful effects of prolonged exposure to playing video games in 3D.

LIQUID CRYSTAL LENSES AND THE PARALLAX

In a nutshell, 3D is all about sending a different picture into each eye so that the brain can meld the two images together, creating one complete picture. In the real world, we perceive objects to be in 3D because our eyes send a number of different signals to our brain that interpret the object and its place in the surrounding environment.

Light waves tell us the object's size, shape, and contour (this is easily portrayed in 2D) while distance comes from the angle of your eyes as they converge to focus on the target. The closer the object is, the more your eyes angle toward your nose to see it.

"For objects that are relatively near, our brain uses parallax—the images of objects at various distances as seen by the left and right eyes," says Dr. Charles Falco, professor of optical sciences at the University of Arizona. "Another visual clue for 3D information is size. Since most adults are roughly the same height, if one person in a scene appears to be much smaller than the others, our brain interprets that as due to them being far from us."

Since your eyes communicate depth in several ways, a few

FOR OBJECTS THAT ARE RELATIVELY NEAR, OUR BRAIN USES PARALLAX—THE IMAGES OF OBJECTS AT VARIOUS DISTANCES AS SEEN BY THE LEFT AND RIGHT EYES.

—Dr. Charles Falco, professor of optical sciences at the University of Arizona

technologies help create the illusion of 3D. Active Shuttering is the most popular modern technique. This method uses glasses with liquid crystal lenses that can be electrically switched between opaque and transparent and are used to rapidly block one lens at a time. The television and glasses are synced so that the glasses block one eye at precisely the same moment that the television shows the image intended for the other. In just one-sixtieth of a second, each eye is individually shown a slightly different version of an image. This process repeats up to 120 times per second—so fast that you'd never be able to consciously notice the effect—to produce fluid movement in high-definition 3D.

3D dependant on wearing glasses, however, is likely a transitory stage in the technology's evolution. Most experts believe many consumers will hesitate to spring for an expensive 3DTV—which currently sell for as much as several thousand dollars—until glasses-free models are available. While glasses-free 3D, dubbed "autostereoscopic 3D" (see sidebar "Autostereoscopy: The Elimination of 3D Glasses" on how autostereoscopic 3D works), already exists—in Japanese mobile phones and in the upcoming Nintendo 3DS—a large-scale HDTV version of auto-3D is still in its infancy. Every technique so far has flaws, particularly when viewed in high definition. The glasses-free 3D technology currently in development for HDTVs usually involves extremely limited viewing angles and distances in order to work properly, and others can only be done in very small sizes or poor resolutions.

Master Image President James Bower, whose company has already developed functioning autostereoscopic 3D for products like the Hitachi Wooo mobile phone, says it's only a matter a time before we play 3D video games without glasses.

"There are still some things to work out on a TV screen, but I can tell you glasses-free 3DTV *will* be released; it will be commercializable; and it will have a great impact in the 3D display business and on 3D gaming," Bower says.

THE DAMAGE DONE

For the last century, the popularity of 3D has come and gone in waves—with the earliest 3D film *The Power of Love* (no relation to the hit song by Huey Lewis and the News) arriving in theaters in 1922. Rarely does 3D stick around long enough to generate interest in funding extensive long-term research projects that investigate any potential health ramifications. But in recent short-term studies, Dr. Martin Banks, a researcher at the University of California, Berkeley, found that focused viewing for just 45 minutes can cause eye strain and blurry vision.

He explains the way our eyes focus and converge (the angle of our eyes) is hardwired into our brain to work together. But viewing a 3D image separates the eyes in an abnormal fashion. Your eyes may need to angle themselves toward a point 5 feet in front of the screen to see the content, but since light still comes from the television, your eyes will focus on it. The result is a constant fight between your brain and your eyes.

Even in the modern 3D era's relative infancy, evidence exists of some of the potential dangers of prolonged exposure to 3D. Earlier this year, Josh James, an 18-year-old "straight A student" from Plymouth, Massachusetts, flipped over his car on the freeway several times after watching Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* in 3D. James claims the movie gave him blurry vision, pain in his temples, and eventually caused him to black out and wreck his vehicle.

The great unanswered question about 3D gaming is what will happen when gamers begin regularly putting their eyes through the rigors of 10-hour-long 3D Halo marathons. "We subjected people to 45 minutes of pretty intensive viewing," Banks says, "and that definitely caused them to experience fatigue and discomfort. I suspect that longer viewing would cause a great deal more discomfort."

Beyond that, Dr. Neil Dodgson, a University of Cambridge researcher of 3D display technology, says that long gaming sessions even on normal TVs are already hard on the eyes. "Your eyes are focusing on a single distance the whole time," Dodgson explains. "That is hard on your vision. You are much more used to constantly flicking between focusing near and focusing far."

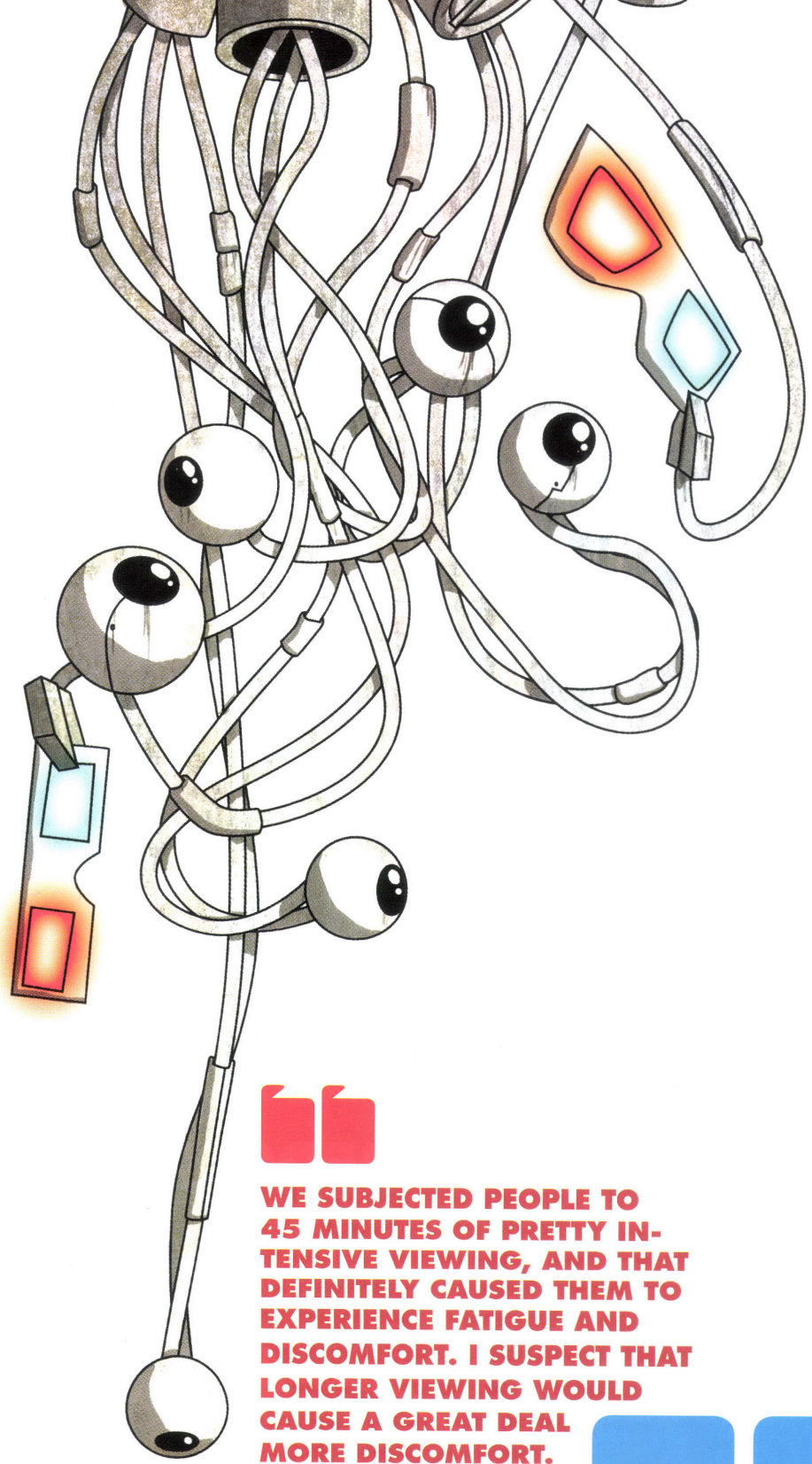
It's not all bad news, though. Methods exist for mitigating eye strain. Surprisingly, the onus for protecting the eyes of gamers isn't on the 3DTV manufacturer but rather on game developers. Dodgson says that a restrained use of the technology can ease the strain on your eyes, such as keeping the objects in the game from jumping too far out from the screen or diving too far in.

"Game designers need to be careful about pulling things too far out of the screen or pushing things too far back," Dodgson warns. "In the movies, they vary the depth-budget of different scenes. Many scenes are very shallow in depth, which gives the eyes a rest between the big, deep action shots. Game designers are going to have to learn how to use 3D appropriately. Part of that is learning how to ensure they don't harm gamers' vision with excessive depth."

A STORYTELLING TOOL

Modern 3D technology has the potential to reinvent the way we play video games, but only *if* its integration into gaming makes sense to the consumer and doesn't feel like it's being jammed down their throats. For film, the extra dimension is frequently a bonus, but many believe 3DTV could fundamentally enhance video gaming. But will it be enough to convince people to upgrade their televisions and potentially crop their gaming time considerably to avoid eye strain?

Dodgson thinks so, but he's quick to clarify that as of the present, 3D gaming remains just theoretical potential that no one has realized yet. He notes that film directors have already shown how 3D can be more than just eye



WE SUBJECTED PEOPLE TO 45 MINUTES OF PRETTY INTENSIVE VIEWING, AND THAT DEFINITELY CAUSED THEM TO EXPERIENCE FATIGUE AND DISCOMFORT. I SUSPECT THAT LONGER VIEWING WOULD CAUSE A GREAT DEAL MORE DISCOMFORT.

—Dr. Martin Banks, researcher at the University of California, Berkeley

GAME DESIGNERS ARE GOING TO HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO USE 3D APPROPRIATELY. PART OF THAT IS LEARNING HOW TO ENSURE THEY DON'T HARM GAMERS' VISION WITH EXCESSIVE DEPTH.

–Dr. Neil Dodgson, University of Cambridge researcher of 3D display technology

candy—and even a powerful tool for telling stories.

"In [the film] *Up*, the 3D was executed well," Dodgson says. "The director used the 3D to help tell the story. The moody, sad scenes had less depth, while the exciting action scenes had more depth. That is one way to use 3D as a storytelling tool."

Of course, 3D films like *Journey to the Center of the Earth* prove the opposite can be true—sometimes 3D substitutes for a deficient story line.

Dodgson explains that color was once a similar novelty in film. Once filmmakers learned to use color to actually enhance their work, it quickly gained mass appeal. "We know how to use color well, and we are learning how to use 3D well. We need to learn how to use 3D appropriately so that people enjoy watching films or playing video games in 3D while not being constantly reminded of the fact that they're seeing something in 3D."

THE NEXT STAGE

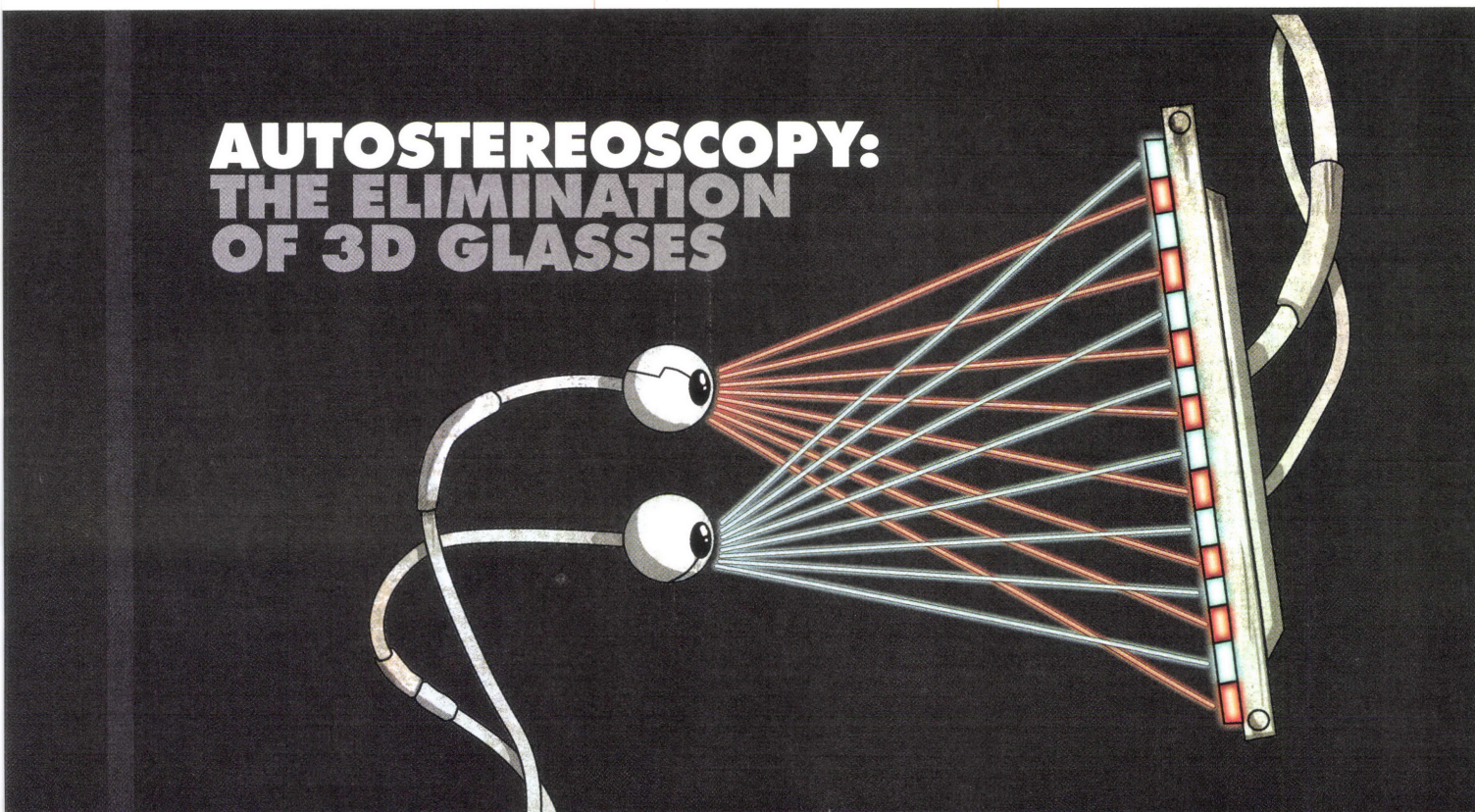
As a storytelling device, 3D may not be something consumers absolutely need, but its potential is exciting. Modern 3D entertainment appears to be the precursor of something far greater than what we have today.

Major advances in television technology tend to emerge every couple of years in order to entice consumers to upgrade. And just as 3DTV becomes the norm, TV manufacturers will undoubtedly be working on developing "the next big thing." But what exactly is 3D entertainment leading to?

"The obvious next step is to move to wall-size 3DTV—the movie theater at home," Dodgson says. "Beyond that we move to wrap-around television—a screen on every wall, making the viewer completely and literally immersed. IMAX has already shown that wrapping the screen around the audience can make for a stunning, engrossing experience."

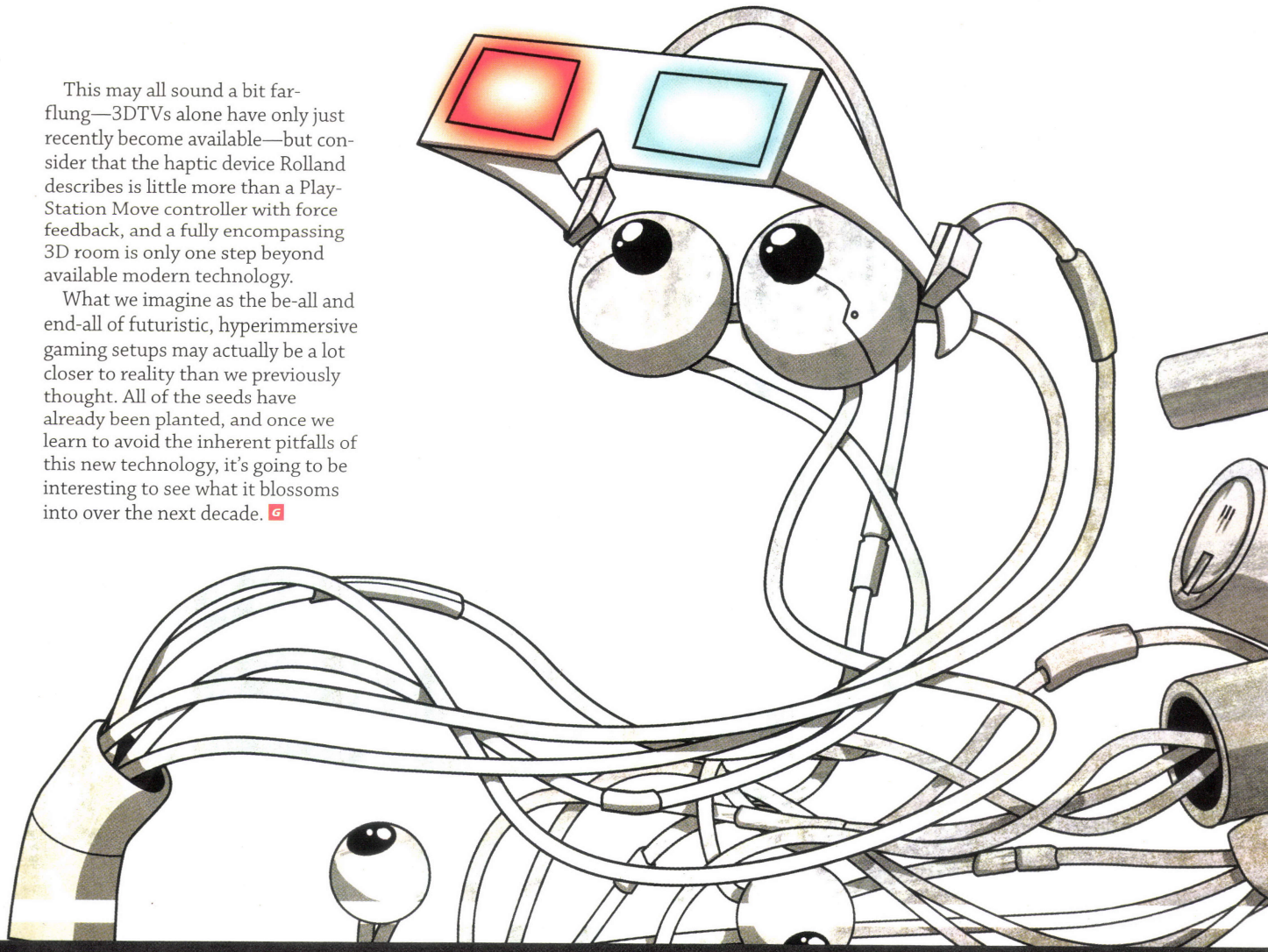
Jannick Rolland, professor of optical engineering at the University of Rochester, takes this one step further. "If the display of images is coupled with haptic [touch] technology as well, you could use a haptic glove to create the feeling of resistance and force to feel the objects, too," Rolland says.

AUTOSTEREOSCOPY: THE ELIMINATION OF 3D GLASSES



This may all sound a bit far-flung—3DTVs alone have only just recently become available—but consider that the haptic device Rolland describes is little more than a PlayStation Move controller with force feedback, and a fully encompassing 3D room is only one step beyond available modern technology.

What we imagine as the be-all and end-all of futuristic, hyperimmersive gaming setups may actually be a lot closer to reality than we previously thought. All of the seeds have already been planted, and once we learn to avoid the inherent pitfalls of this new technology, it's going to be interesting to see what it blossoms into over the next decade. G



With Nintendo unveiling the first mainstream autostereoscopic gaming platform, the Nintendo 3DS, many believe the future of 3D games will be sans glasses. The technology behind the mobile phones that are already available in Japan is getting closer to becoming the next evolution of 3D entertainment. Even as recently as the 3D Gaming Summit in April, both mobile and big-screen implementations of autostereoscopic 3D were on display.

"When I worked at a laboratory in Princeton called The David Sarnoff Research Center over 15 years ago, there were autostereoscopic prototypes," says Mark Long, founder of Zombie Studios. "The way these TVs work are kind of like those winking-girl postcards. If you peeled off the plastic on those, you would see that there are these striped images cut up. There's a polarizing filter that shows different images across multiple 3D zones when tilted.

"Currently, each zone requires that you cut up the resolution of the screen to achieve that zone or you have a higher frame rate. You can only have two to four zones, which is perfect for a home. When you're sitting on a sofa, I can just tilt my head a little bit and be able to see the 3D. It'll be a long time before we'd be able to do that in a movie theater, because we'd need to achieve 64 or more zones."

But for the small screen of the Nintendo 3DS or a Hitachi Wooo mobile phone, this technology works seamlessly. Master Image President and COO James Bower says his company focuses on enabling all the handset manufacturers and game console makers with their autostereoscopic technology.

Sharp has been working with Nintendo on an autostereoscopic 3D solution that uses parallax barrier technology. Bower says it costs less than $20 to put Master Image technology in a mobile phone.

"Autostereoscopic 3D is what everybody wants," says Reuben Langdon, president of Just Cause Productions, which has developed stereo 3D video games like Resident Evil 5 and Lost Planet 2 for the PC with Capcom. "Everybody keeps telling me—because they know I'm in the 3D business—'Oh, you're in 3D. That's great, but you have to wear those silly glasses.' That's the first thing everybody says. I always tell them, 'You won't have to for long. Just bear with it for a couple of years and we'll be glasses-free soon.'"

Langdon says having the Nintendo 3DS come out with autostereoscopic technology so quickly is proof that it's the future of 3D.

"I'm excited to see how the Nintendo 3DS is going to work," Langson says. "I have seen autostereoscopic 3D. It's impressive, but there are limitations. I think that's why everybody hasn't gotten there yet. Hopefully, down the road we'll see autostereoscopic 3D everywhere."

"Autostereoscopic is really where we're all going to be 10 years from now," Long says. "We'll see glasses for about the next 5 to 8 years, tops, and then autostereoscopic will take off after that."

Hollywood Producer Ari Arad believes once autostereoscopic TVs become mainstream, game developers will face challenges because of viewing angles. "For a stand-up party game, you'll need more viewing areas," Arad notes. "But if the gaming experience is for one or two people sitting on a couch, then that works perfect for autostereoscopic 3D."

Experts agree that while 3D with glasses will be the focal point for this year and likely the next few years, once autostereoscopic takes off—and Nintendo and mobile-phone makers warm gamers up to this technology—the future of 3D will likely be without glasses.

—John Gaudiosi

DRIVER

San Francisco

THE CLASSIC CHASE GAME RETURNS TO ITS ROOTS, WITH ITS ORIGINAL CREATIVE LEAD TAKING THE REINS. THIS TIME, HOWEVER, THE TALE CARRIES A TWIST.

MARTIN EDMONDSON is a name you should probably know. Despite his absence from the forefront of game development in recent years, Edmondson's creative influence still permeates the industry decades after he first started crafting games. Developers such as Rockstar, Black Box, and Criterion note Edmondson's taste for and execution of 1970s-style car chases as an influence for their seminal works. After a lengthy hiatus, he's back in the driving seat at Reflections, the studio he formed in 1984 (now part of Ubisoft), and his first work is a return to the franchise that really put him on the map: Driver. The new title, set in San Francisco, blends familiar themes from the 11-year-old franchise with some fresh ideas that may prove to influence the genre as much now as his early works did at the dawn of the PlayStation generation. >>>

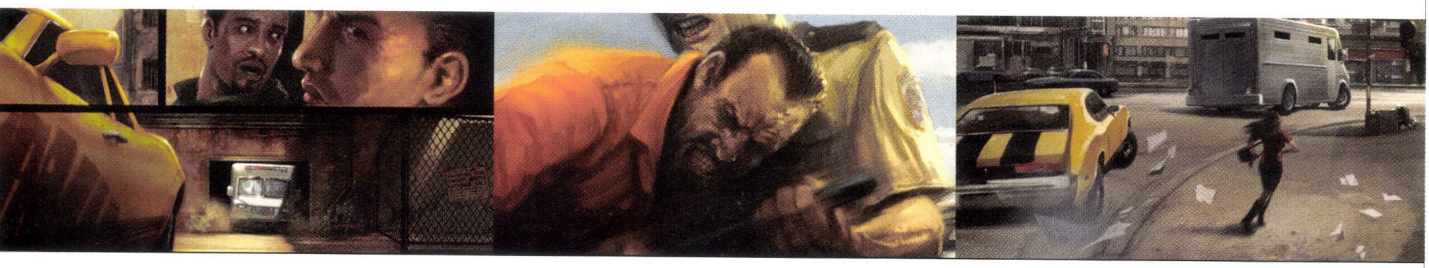
"MY REAL PASSION HAS ALWAYS BEEN GAMES. ON A DAY-TO-DAY BASIS, THIS IS WHAT I REALLY WANT TO BE DOING." — MARTIN EDMONDSON, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, UBISOFT REFLECTIONS

BACK in the early days of the original PlayStation, Edmondson's team experimented with a different approach to driving games. Up until this point, the majority of 3D racers drew their inspiration from the classics of the time, notably Test Drive, Ridge Racer, and Need for Speed. In Destruction Derby, Reflections' 1995 release for Sony's fledgling console, he introduced the idea of *realistically* destructible vehicles and physics-based handling: ideas that had been rarely mastered for, and never properly integrated into, arcade-style driving games. The game was so successful that it spawned three sequels before Edmondson and his team decided to spin the lessons they'd learned into something more ambitious.

In 1999 the studio released the original Driver, an open-world car-chase game influenced by '70s cop shows like *Starsky and Hutch* and movies like *Bullitt*. Like Destruction Derby before it, the game proved to be incredibly successful and began a franchise that went on to sell more than 14 million copies.

Controversy rocked Reflections and then-publisher Atari in 2004 when the third game in the series, clumsily dubbed Driv3r, was rushed to market due to financial concerns and consequently flopped, both critically and commercially. Edmondson left the company as a result and later sued the publisher due to "constructive unfair dismissal as a result of Reflections alleged repudiatory breach of a contract of employment that necessitated [his] resignation."

After the messy breakup, Edmondson's brother, Gareth, took over the reins at the studio, which went on to produce the woefully underfunded and poorly received retro-themed 2006 release Driver: Parallel Lines. By the end of that same year, Atari was experiencing deep financial troubles and sold Reflections, along with all associated intellectual property, to Ubisoft for $24 million. The studio, renamed Ubisoft Reflections, quickly released a PSP variant of Parallel Lines dubbed Driver 76 before disappearing from public view.



"[TANNER] CHEATED DEATH, AND AS TIME PROGRESSES, HE'S INCREASINGLY AWARE THAT THIS HAS AFFECTED HIM PSYCHOLOGICALLY." — MARTIN EDMONDSON

Meanwhile, Edmondson was taking a break from game development. "After the company was sold, I just wanted to go and do a bunch of completely different things," he says during an interview at an Ubisoft press event a month before the game's official unveiling at E3. "I went to spend some time working with a company working on LCD screen technology, and I did some mobile-phone licensing stuff. But my real passion has always been games. On a day-to-day basis, this is what I really want to be doing."

During his hiatus, he never stopped thinking about the potential for the franchise he created, and when the opportunity arose to rejoin the studio as part of Ubisoft, he jumped at it. "The franchise had drifted away from what it was originally designed to be, and by Driv3r, it was really quite different," Edmondson says. "To be honest, we never got to properly finish that game, so it seemed like we'd left the universe that we created in a bad way. With the new game, we have a chance to bring the whole thing back to its roots, focus on realistic, Hollywood-style car chases, and return to the characters that we set up all those years ago."

As in the previous games, players step into the shoes of Tanner—a gritty cop with a penchant for power slides—in his efforts to take down his nemesis, Jericho. When we last saw the characters, Jericho had shot Tanner and left him for dead, leading many players to believe that the character had come to an untimely and unexpected demise at Driv3r's end. Driver: San Francisco picks up three months after these events; initially, Tanner seeks revenge for what happened to him while investigating Jericho's criminal network in San Francisco.

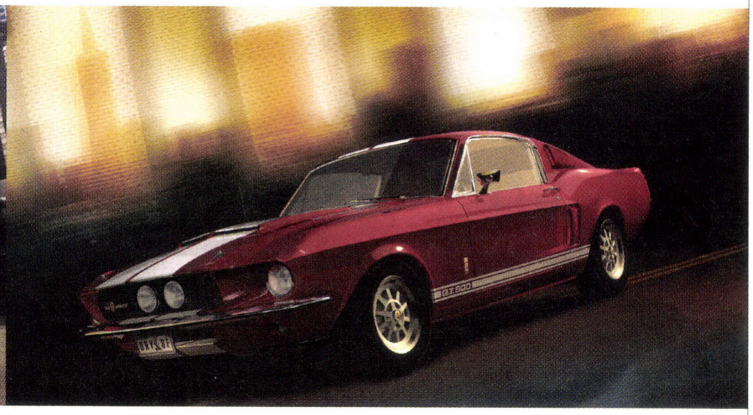
At first glance, the new game is a fitting update to a previous formula. Its large and expansive play area is accurately modeled after the city of San Francisco, as well as outlying areas in Oakland and Marin County, and it includes "hundreds" of licensed cars that span the mundane to the exotic. Cars slide around the way we remember in previous Drivers, and the whole thing

looks suitably high definition and runs at a silky-smooth 60 frames per second.

Where things get *really* different is in the underlying gameplay structure and the conceit that Edmondson and his team have constructed to facilitate it. "At the beginning of the game, you're reminded that Tanner has had a near-death experience," he explains. "He cheated death, and as time progresses, he's increasingly aware that this has affected him psychologically." As he explains this, Edmondson hits a button on the PlayStation 3 controller, which zooms the action up and away from the car that he'd been driving to show a broader view of the city. "As you can see, we have lots of traffic moving around, and everything you see here is controlled by A.I. All of these cars have drivers in them that are going about their business." Then, as he moves a targeting reticule over a car that's passing by, the action zooms into that car and hands over complete control of it to the player. "This is a feature we call 'Shift,'" Edmondson beams triumphantly. "You can target any car in the game and zap into it like that. When you get in it, you have complete control, and when you leave it, the A.I. takes over again and goes about its business."

It's an impressive effect, one that's reminiscent of the whoosh of the player-swapping function in Battlefield 2: Modern Combat, but its justification in Driver: San Francisco is both fascinating *and* provocative. "So, in the fiction of the game, Tanner thinks that he's able to initiate an out-of-body experience," Edmondson explains. "It's a resource-managed effect, but the character believes that the more daring he is out on the roads, the more he's able to channel this ability. What the character *doesn't* know, but the player *does*, is that the entire game and its story is happening in Tanner's head. He's not really there. He's still in a coma, recovering from being shot by Jericho, and he's simply playing out this revenge fantasy that you are now controlling."

What this elaborate ruse allows for is a complete break from traditional gameplay



structures and a complete new way of constructing a narrative. "Every car in the game has someone driving it, and many of the people that you encounter by zapping yourself into them have some kind of objective that can or needs to be accomplished. This is how we communicate all of our missions in the game," Edmondson enthuses, as he zaps Tanner into the consciousness of a cop by way of illustration.

"What you can see here is that we're now controlling a cop who's in the middle of a chase. It's an important objective for us to complete, and we need to find some way of stopping that car." With this, he swerves the cop-painted Dodge Charger into a wall and smashes it up. As it crumples, he zooms out, shifts into a *different* cop car, and immediately resumes chasing the bad guy, while the previous cop's A.I. maneuvers itself to re-enter the fray. "We can hop from car to car, but we can also look ahead and see if we can block the road rather than simply chase him." With this, he shifts to a conveniently placed 18-wheeler driving in the opposite direction and uses the big rig to block the road before shifting back into one of the police cruisers. "We have all kinds of dynamic elements like that," he beams. "The final game will include big rigs, tow trucks, and even car transporters that you can shift into to set up unique gameplay possibilities."

While the demo on show in May was very early in the game's development, the potential for both single-player and multiplayer gameplay is clearly evident. It's a remarkably ambitious approach to the structure of an open-world game, especially to the mission management within it. While justified by a metastory with more than a hint of *Life on Mars*–style sci-fi, the core takeaway at this early point is that the new gameplay ideas are the primary concern, with the story line crafted to explain the gameplay without feeling the need to remain overly realistic. "It's an incredibly complicated undertaking," Edmondson explains, "but we think it's a unique approach to this kind of game." He's certainly right about that.

SAM LAKE ON ALAN WAKE

INTER-VIEW

after/the/credits.

Originally announced around the time of the Xbox 360's launch, Alan Wake has finally seen the light of day, earning praise from critics as an atmospheric and original action title that stands apart from the system's more bombastic Halo and Gears of War exclusives. Max Payne creators Remedy Entertainment blend unique light-based combat and a narrative laced with the best elements of television drama with the company's already excellent shooter engine. Lead writer and former Max Payne face-model Sam Lake explains how Alan Wake balances game and TV influences, what to make of the game's ambiguous end, and what the future has in store for the haunted author.

GamePro: *How hard is it to craft a unique universe while taking the time to pay homage to pop-culture staples?*
Sam Lake: When we were thinking about the high-level vision of the game, the sources of inspiration were fresh in our mind and a positive spark of energy to set things in motion. After that period, however, we were making our own thing for a long time. Every once in a while [at that stage of development], fun ways to pay homage to various elements of pop-culture would come to us, and we'd write [them] down. In the end we used the ones that made sense and worked well with scenes in the game. For a real-world setting, pop-culture references are a great way to ground the events in reality and make them a part of a larger, recognizable world.

GP: *Do you think having a prominent, bright HUD present at all times hurts the atmospheric experience?*
SL: It was very important for us to make sure that the player always has all relevant information readily available. Alan Wake is a game, and we never wanted to hide [that].

GP: *In some episodes, Alan Wake's progression and the items he collects reset. Sometimes it makes sense within the story, but it often feels like it's punishing thorough players. Why did you make this decision?*
SL: There are certain story and gameplay sequences where it's essential to make sure that the player only has a certain specific set of resources. In the case where we take something away from the player, we very quickly give him back at least as much, and often more.

GP: *With Alan Wake presented via a series of "episodes," did any particular TV shows influence the game? Did any specific episodes of these shows influence the game?*
SL: We are big fans of TV in general, and there are many different TV shows that have made an impression on us. Not so much specific episodes, but series in general. In addition to the often-mentioned programs like *Lost* and *Twin Peaks*, the Night Springs section of the game was influenced by *The Twilight Zone*. Other shows like *Northern Exposure*, *The X-Files*, and *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* served as additional inspiration.

GP: *Some of Alan Wake's manuscript pages are only found on the game's most difficult setting. How much are casual fans missing from the overall Alan Wake experience if they never seek out these pages?*
SL: All the necessary info is there when you play the game for the first time. The additional pages found only in the Nightmare mode serve to provide additional fun details and alternative perspectives to the game's events.

GP: *The final, haunting words in Alan Wake imply the darkness that has engulfed Bright Falls is much greater than anyone ever thought. Is this a hint that Alan Wake will face The Taken in different settings? Like his hometown of New York?*
SL: You are encouraged to come up with your own conclusions to the narrative. We consider Alan Wake a complete story even if we do open doors for future story developments. We'd never intentionally spoil any further story twists beforehand. Spoilers can ruin a good thriller's story. It's safe to say that we have planned Alan Wake to be a bigger thing than just the first game.

"It's safe to say that we have planned Alan Wake to be a bigger thing than just the first game."
—Sam Wake, lead writer of Alan Wake

GP: *Going forward, what kind of story can players expect from the downloadable content planned for Alan Wake?*
SL: For a story-driven game like Alan Wake, we feel that there can never be any additional content without a focus on the story. The DLC will take certain story aspects forward. We see the DLC as a special feature of a TV series between two seasons—a bridge between the first game and the potential sequel. If gamers like Alan Wake and want more, we'd be more than happy to do more.

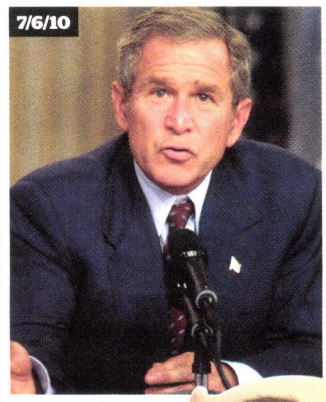
GP: *Are there things you learned in the creation of this game, as well as Max Payne 2, that you'll apply to any further sequels in this story?*
SL: We have spent close to six years building a strong foundation, the technology, and the universe of Alan Wake. We feel that we are in a great place when it comes to potential sequels.

GP: *Alan Wake scatters great nods to Max Payne in certain areas throughout—including excerpts from Wake's detective novel that read like they were pulled directly from Max Payne's universe. Does Alan Wake contain homages to Remedy's first game, the recently rereleased Death Rally?*
SL: At Cauldron Lake Lodge, one of the patients is a burned-out game developer with a Death Rally poster on the wall of his room. We have a few more small Death Rally references planned for the DLC.

GP: *Who would win in a fight: the Log Lady from* Twin Peaks *or the Lady of the Light from Alan Wake?*
SL: The ladies would probably just sit down over a cup of coffee and have a cryptic conversation that no one else would understand.
—Xav De Matos

EVENT CALENDAR

7/1/10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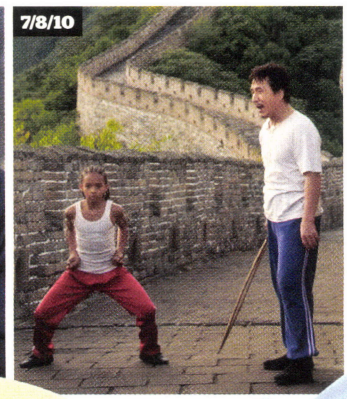
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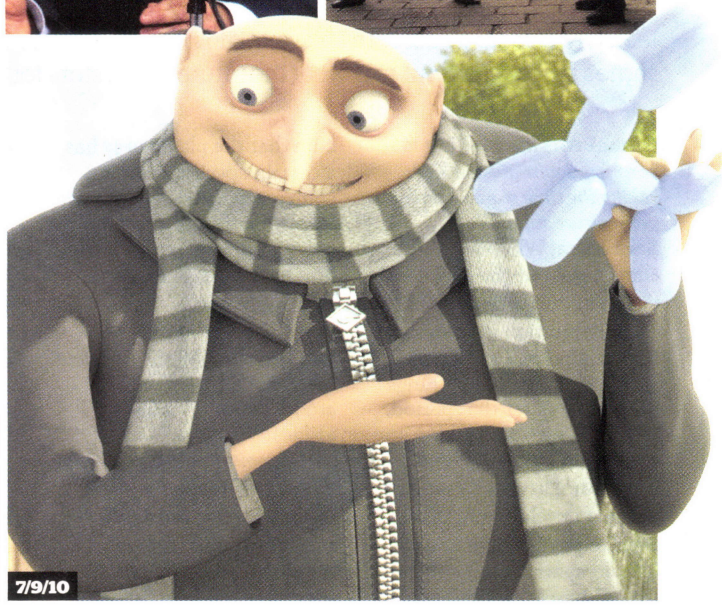

7/9/10

JULY 2010

It's the month that StarCraft II comes out; is there anything else as important?

(release dates are subject to change)

7/1/10

Missy Elliott turns 39, and Pamela Anderson is 43. It's also Canada Day, which celebrates the anniversary of when two British colonies united as a single country on July 1, 1867.

7/2/10

Lindsay Lohan makes it to 24 today, and Michelle Brand is 27. Larry David, everyone's favorite cranky old man, turns 63. M. Night Shyamalan's *The Last Airbender*, based on the excellent Nickelodeon show, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, hits theaters. They changed the name for obvious reasons.

7/3/10

Tom Cruise is 48.

7/4/10

Let off some fireworks—it's Independence Day.

7/6/10

George W. Bush turns 64 the same day that the Dalai Lama turns 75 and Nancy Reagan hits 89. No doubt they'll all show up at 50 Cent's house, as he's celebrating his 34th. Perhaps they'll all head to the annual Running of the Bulls in Pamplona, or maybe they'll just head out and pick up a copy of the long-awaited Crackdown 2 for Xbox 360. It's a good day for PSP owners, too: Ace Combat: Joint Assault and Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3 Portable arrive in stores. *Brooklyn's Finest*, starring Richard Gere, Don Cheadle, Ethan Hawke, and the one-and-only Wesley Snipes, is out on DVD and Blu-ray.

7/7/10

Remember when we used to think that Adrian Brody was a really serious actor? He's in the *Predator* reboot that releases today, *Predators*.

7/8/10

The new *Karate Kid*, son-of-Will Jaden Smith, is 12 today. He shares a birthday with Kevin Bacon, who is 52, and Toby Keith, who is 49.

7/9/10

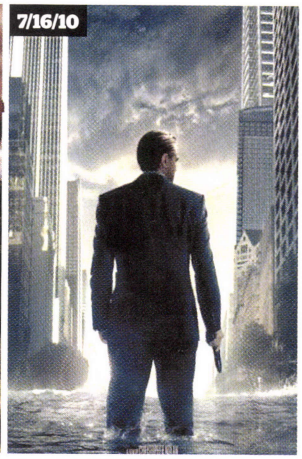
Despicable Me, the other big animated hit of the summer (after *Toy Story 3*), arrives in theaters today. The game came out earlier this week. Tom Hanks turns 54, Jimmy Smits is 55, and Courtney Love (is that what she's still calling herself?) is 46.

7/11/10

The British Open golf tournament starts at St. Andrews in Scotland and runs until the 18th.

7/13/10

NCAA Football 11 ships on all major platforms today, the same night as the 2009 MLB All-Star Game at Angel Stadium in L.A. Meanwhile, it's Patrick Stewart's 70th



birthday. Also, brace yourself: The official video game adaptation of *The Bachelor* is out for Wii and DS.

7/14/10

It's Bastille Day. What happens on Bastille Day? The French take a day off.

7/15/10

Former Fight Night producer, current Microsoft interface guru, and Elvis-style sunglasses enthusiast Kudo Tsunoda celebrates his 35th birthday today.

7/16/10

On Will Ferrell's 43rd birthday, we get to finally see Christopher Nolan's new movie *Inception*, which has been kept under a shroud of secrecy since it started shooting last year. It stars Leonardo DiCaprio, Ellen Page, and Cillian Murphy. Also out today is Jon Turtelaub's *The Sorcerer 's Apprentice*, starring Nic Cage.

7/17/10

David Hasselhoff celebrates 58 years of hairy-chested manliness today, while *Survivor* creator Mark Burnett turns 50.

7/20/10

The PC MMO compilation City of Heroes: Going Rogue Complete Collection joins both Wii and DS versions of TrackMania Turbo in stores today. Also, Tecmo's vaguely Gears of War-ish Quantum Theory arrives for PS3 and Xbox 360. Two Oscar-winning Technicolor classics make their Blu-ray debut from Criterion: *The Red Shoes* and *Black Narcissus*. These films aptly demonstrate why Jack Cardiff was a master of cinematography.

7/21/10

Former *PC Gamer* editor–turned–*Book of Eli* screenwriter Gary Whitta is 38.

7/23/10

Steve Carell and Paul Rudd join forces (again) in *Dinner for Schmucks*, which hits movie screens today, as does Angelina Jolie's spy-action thriller *Salt*. Daniel Radcliffe is now allowed to drink when he comes to the United States—he turns 21.

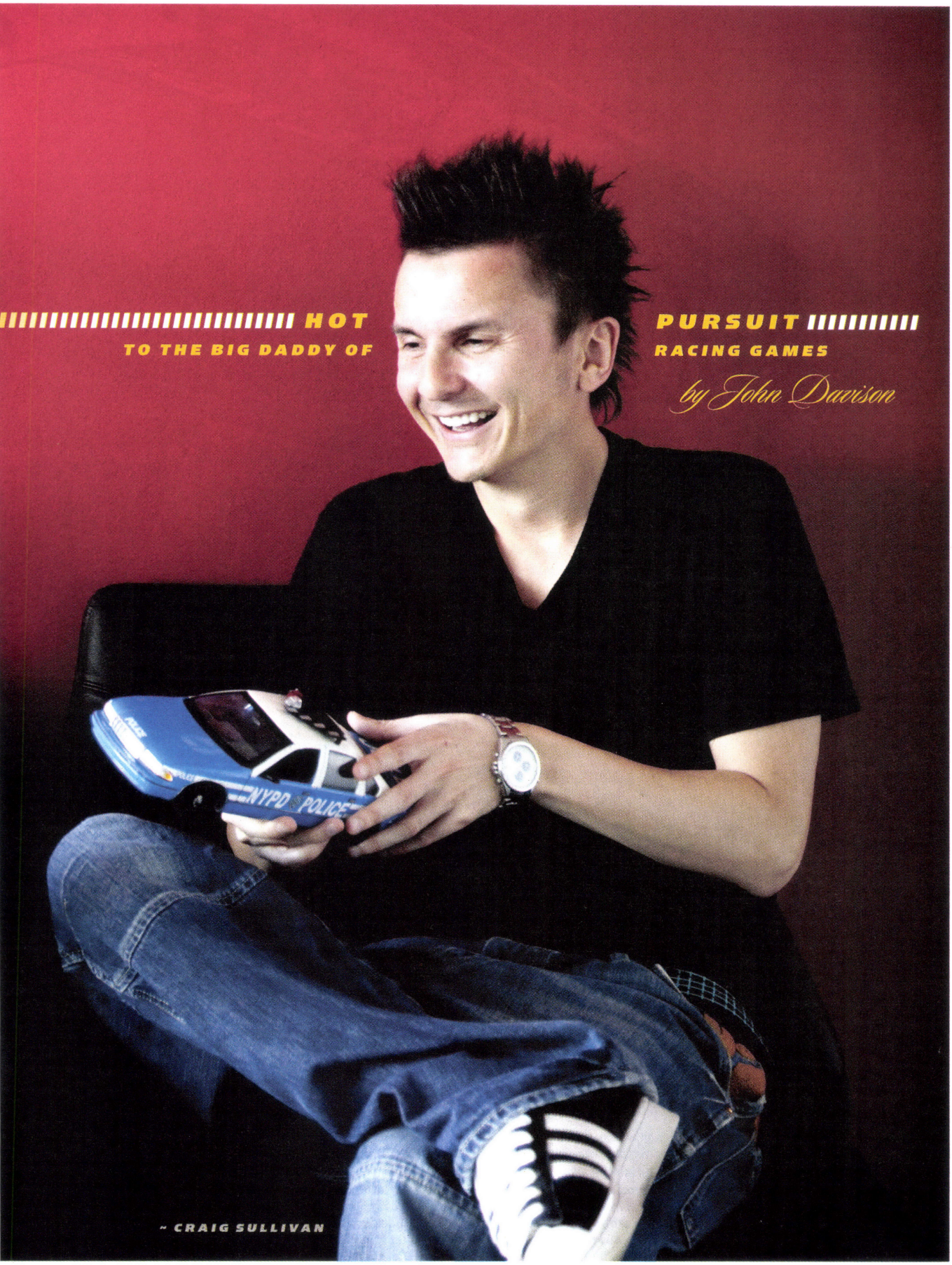
7/26/10

It's an attractive-lady birthday celebration today. Kate Beckinsale is 37, while Oscar-winners Sandra Bullock (46) and Helen Mirren (65) show us that you can be smoking-hot at any age. It's also a couple of old-rockers birthdays. Queen drummer Roger Taylor is 61, and Rolling Stones front man Mick Jagger is 67.

7/27/10

It's one of those days where you'll want to try and get the day off work. After years and years of waiting, StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty is finally available (the same disc features both PC and Mac versions, so pretty much everyone can indulge). If you're somehow immune to its charms, you can also check out the video-game adaptation of Clash of the Titans, BlazBlue: Continuum Shift, and Harvest Moon: Grand Bazaar which all show up at the same time. Failing that, *Cash of the Titans* is out on DVD and Blu-ray.

NEED FOR SPEED
CRITERION GAMES APPLIES THEIR MAGIC
Criterion
~ MATT WEBSTER


HOT
TO THE BIG DADDY OF
PURSUIT
RACING GAMES
by John Davison
NYPD POLICE
~ CRAIG SULLIVAN

Craig Sullivan is a ball of energy. The creative director of Criterion Games bounces into the large conference room dubbed the "Burnout War Room" at the company's headquarters in Guildford just outside of London, and he's immediately struck by the need for props. "Wait a minute—I'll be right back," Sullivan enthuses as he gets up to rummage around behind a huge couch. He emerges with two large toy cars: a bright orange Lamborghini Murciélago LP 640 and a classic Chevrolet Caprice police cruiser. He drops the toys on the room's large conference table and gestures nonchalantly toward them. "There you go," he beams. "That's pretty much all you need to know about this game."

On the wall at the end of the war room hang three large posters featuring the same artwork that you see on the cover of this month's issue of *GamePro*—two exotic supercars frozen in a delicious moment that could *only* be found in a video game. A metallic orange Pagani Zonda R—$1.8 million worth of carbon-fiber lunacy propelled by a gigantic 6.0 liter AMG V12—attempts to elude a similarly bonkers Lamborghini Reventón. What makes the latter even *more* insane is that it's decked out in a police-cruiser paint job from the fictional city of Seacrest. Squeezed between the cars is the logo for Criterion's new creation, the familiar-sounding Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit.

The last time a game carried *that* name was back in 2002, when Hot Pursuit 2 marked the first time that the hugely popular franchise appeared on the PlayStation 2. The *original* Hot Pursuit, which was the subtitle for Need for Speed III, came out 12 years ago and is still regarded as one of the best in the brand's 16-year history (see "Need for Speed/Criterion Timeline"). That Electronic Arts has given Criterion the opportunity to effectively reboot such a storied marque is deeply significant, and that isn't something lost on the team.

Producer Matt Webster joins Sullivan for our early look at the game. Webster is grinning ear-to-ear at the

prospect of finally breaking his silence about what all 80 of Criterion's current employees have been working on for the past year. He grabs the toy cars from in front of Sullivan and pantomimes a little car chase. "Honestly, we have no idea what people are really expecting of us," he admits, letting the cars roll across the tabletop. "Obviously, given that we've spent the last nine years making Burnout, we have a hunch. But we're really not sure how this whole situation is going to be received."

Both Sullivan and Webster have been with Criterion for a long time, and in recent years, they have seen the studio flourish from both a game studio *and* a PlayStation 2–era "middleware" provider (the company produced RenderWare, the engine that helped power numerous big hits, including Grand Theft Auto III, Vice City, and San Andreas as well as the studio's own PS2 and Xbox Burnout games) to a premium creative force within the vast Electronic Arts empire, which acquired the studio in 2004.

Sullivan, who grew up in the town of Cardiff in Wales and trained there as a graphic designer, has spent almost his entire working life in game development. After a brief stint at a design firm in Cardiff, he gave himself a year off to try and find a job that would satiate his real creative love: video games. "Every penny I made was spent at the arcade," he says. "I'd play Street Fighter II, Mortal Kombat, and Virtua Fighter as much as possible. It was Cardiff, so anything involving fighting was popular," he laughs, alluding to the town's violent reputation. "You're not going to believe this, though, but *literally* on the 364th day of that self-imposed deadline, I got my first job offer," he beams.

This first job was as a tester at Cambridge-based computer-games developer Millennium Interactive, the group that Sony Computer Entertainment later acquired and rebranded as Sony Cambridge. Sullivan's first game was the first-person shooter Defcon 5, produced for the PlayStation, Saturn, 3DO, and PC, which he rigorously tested for what he describes as a "pretty meager" salary. He remained with Millennium until its widely praised artificial-life game Creatures shipped in 1996, at which point a headhunter introduced him to the novel idea of "making

more money" at something he was good at. Sullivan joined Criterion in time to witness the release of its submarine "sim" Sub Culture in 1997, and he went on to spin his love of skateboarding into a role as a designer on the futuristic hoverboard games TrickStyle and AirBlade. "I've worked on pretty much everything at the studio since," he says. "Burnout, Black, and then eventually I landed the role of creative director on Paradise."

Webster came up during the same era, but his career has been exclusively at EA. His first exposure to video games, like many in the U.K., came on home computers rather than consoles. He started with a Commodore Vic-20 before graduating to a Commodore 64 and later a Sony MSX. "I think I must have been the only kid in England with an MSX," he chuckles. "After that I got an Atari ST, and it was around that time that the possibility of a career in games really became apparent." Webster's first job was in customer service at the fledgling U.K. outpost of Electronic Arts. "I was just the second person in customer service, and at this point there were only 35 people in the whole European arm of the company," he says. "In those days, of course, customer service was as much about helping people get through parts of the game as it was dealing with any technical problems." Because of this, the customer-service team found itself looped into the quality-assurance and testing schedule, and this was how Webster got his break. "I got to do some QA with the guys at Bullfrog," he says, speaking of Peter Molyneux' first studio, which EA owned at the time. "My first game was Powermonger on the ST, so I really lucked out there. From there I got to work on some real classics: Syndicate, Theme Park, Magic Carpet...all that good stuff." Webster eventually shifted to Criterion, which is just down the street from Bullfrog's offices, and became the producer for Burnout 3, the first EA-published game in the series. He later served as the producer for both Revenge and Paradise.

"We absolutely revere the Need for Speed brand," Webster says. "We all have fantastic memories from all of the games in the series, but none of them are quite as powerful as that original

game back in 1994 on the 3DO. That was such an 'Oh, my god!' moment for anyone that saw it," Webster exclaims. "I played the original on a borrowed 3DO system while a friend of mine went away on holiday," Sullivan enthuses. "It was unlike anything I'd ever played before, and I remember it being very difficult to give it back when he got home. It was supercool and utterly contemporary. All of that attention to those exotic cars—and it was very much of the moment. **If there's one thing that Need for Speed has always done really well, it's always been that—*of the moment.*"**

THE ULTIMATE DRIVING MACHINE

Need for Speed has long been one of the best-selling franchises in Electronic Arts' stable, and it's one of the most successful gaming brands ever. More than 100 million copies have been sold since the original Need for Speed debuted in 1994, and it has evolved dramatically over the years to reflect both the prevailing gaming and automotive cultures. Typically developed at EA's studio in Vancouver, that Criterion is now charged with such a significant release is a reflection of the changing culture within the publishing giant—and its confidence in the British studio. No doubt central to this is the success of Criterion's seminal work, Burnout: Paradise—an ambitious open-world racing title released in 2008 that was subsequently followed by a "Year of Paradise" in which Criterion frequently updated and tweaked the game with regular downloadable content and online events. In an unusual move from the parent company, EA's release schedule forced Paradise to compete toe-to-toe with its stablemate, Need for Speed: Undercover, a move that confused observers and raised the question of the publisher's confidence in *either* franchise. While Undercover matched the sales performance of its predecessor, its critical reception was diabolical. Critics panned it for its Hollywood pretensions and narrative focus while questioning how EA could allow such an inferior game to erode the success of the far superior Paradise.

By early 2009, many fans were questioning whether Need for Speed had outstayed its welcome and were surprised to learn that *four* new titles were

in development: the sim-like Shift, the Wii-specific arcade-racer Nitro, a free-to-play online racing MMO dubbed Need for Speed: World, and another "secret" title.

"Yeah, that last one was us," Sullivan laughs. "Honestly, we were pretty surprised that they said 'yes' when we asked them if we could take a crack at it. It was definitely a shock. The meeting where we came in and told the whole team was a trip. Seeing everyone's reaction was great. It was a real boost for everyone because this is a really *big f***ing deal.* **In the past with the Burnout stuff, we've pretty much been making it all up as we go along, but we've really had to step things up a notch with Need for Speed."**

THE CRITERION TOUCH

Many racing-game studios spend weeks researching the cars they're trying to simulate by borrowing them from the manufacturers, taking them to a racetrack, and poking a microphone up their tailpipe. The Criterion crew has a very different attitude. While they want to celebrate the exotic cars as much as any other studio, they emphasize gameplay rather than spot-on re-creations of cars. Teams like Polyphony Digital, Turn 10, and Bizarre Creations go to track days and wow us with photo blogs of their staff sliding Ferrari Enzos around hairpin turns and smoking the tires on '70s muscle cars. The Criterion team's preparation looks nothing like this. "We went to a go-kart track," Sullivan laughs. "And then we all got banned for life for being too aggressive and breaking the karts."

Of course, being asked to shepherd the next installment of such a beloved series is one thing, but Sullivan had some concerns that were bothering him at first. "We spent a lot of time thinking about what we could possibly bring to the table," he confesses, idly rolling the toy police car back and forth. "Honestly, we wondered how we were going to make a game that would really fit in such esteemed company. We've always been very vocal about our games. We always want to make an experience as fun as possible and hopefully make people laugh. If there's a chance for something to go either way, I like to think that we always side with the player."

As he continues to roll the cop car back and forth, Sullivan looks up as he stops it dead. "Early on, Need for Speed was about exotics. Then, in the second era of the franchise, it was about the tuner culture and the illicit nature of street racing. There was something common throughout that would always pop up, though, and it was never really explored." He picks up the cop car, fiddles with its wheels, and continues. "These guys," he exclaims. "There have been cops in lots of Need for Speed games, but they've never really been explored much, so we're mixing the two together. **Every car in our car list, which is pretty extensive, comes in two flavors—the racer, and then a cop-car version, which is tweaked so that it's a bit more powerful. The manufacturers all love the idea, too—they all want to see how cool their cars look with the cop paint job. It makes sense for us, too, from a gameplay standpoint," he chuckles. "It would be pretty incongruous if you got busted in a Bugatti Veyron by a cop in a Chevy Blazer."**

At this point Webster interjects his thoughts on one of the studio's favorite titles from the series. "We all loved the original because it was such an important game in the grand scheme of things, but I think our real favorite was Most Wanted," he explains, describing the 2005 game that was the first in the series to appear on the Xbox 360. "That game had that great 'black list' mechanic where you were chasing after rivals, but the real driving force behind everything was the fact that the cops were chasing you and the 'heat' level would rise to reflect how much trouble you were in."

"That was a really important thing for us when we were looking at our game concept," Sullivan continues. "Also, it's worth noting that the No. 1 most-requested feature from players since as far back as we could find was cop stuff. Any time you ask people what they want, they never say, 'Oh, more exotics, please'; they say they want to drive the cop cars." With this he puts down the toy Caprice and picks up the Lamborghini. "So we thought about it a lot and ended up coming to the conclusion that the best possible thing for us to do would be to put as much emphasis on the cops as we do on the racers.

"When you think about it, it's the easiest thing in the world to communicate, right? There are two sides to this equation, and they both have very basic and understandable roles. Cops chase bad guys. Our whole concept is based on a very, very simple gameplay loop of running and chasing."

Once they established this fundamental concept, the team could draw on its experience with Burnout: Paradise to further flesh out the concept. "In Paradise we had a lot of single-player gameplay structure, but there was a lot of emphasis on sharing the game world with your friends and playing together," Sullivan explains. "When we started work on Hot Pursuit, it was always clear that the idea of playing with other humans...of being *chased* by other humans... was going to be the real core of this experience. **People are just so much smarter than A.I. They can react to what they see on the screen, and they can behave in much more interesting ways as they adapt to what's in front of them."**

"That 'Year of Paradise' was such an important exercise for us and incredibly influential with regard to this project," Webster reveals. "Obviously, we had no idea we'd be moving on to this project at the time, but all of the telemetry systems we built into that game taught us a lot about the way people play," he says. "Not only could we see where people got stuck or the kinds of things they would do, but we were able to test our own assumptions about player behavior. What we learned was that people like to dick around in a game like that. We produced so much content in the original release, but less than 5 percent of the audience actually played everything we gave them. If I remember right, about 95 percent of the audience only played for about 3 to 5 hours. Now that we know that, we've been able to make some important decisions about how we present Hot Pursuit."

TOTALLY CONNECTED

With this, Sullivan and Webster boot up a pair of PlayStation 3 test units and load a very early demonstration of the core gameplay loop for us to try. At this stage it's just a simple 1-on-1 gameplay environment with a Lamborghini LP 640 runner and a Reventón cop car—just like on the poster. "In the final game,

we'll have a lot of gameplay with teams," Webster explains, handing over the DualShock 3. "In the real world, cops roll with backup, and racers roll in crews. But for the purposes of showing you how the game is going to work, this is a good demo."

As you'd expect, the game has a familiar look to it and is an interesting blend of both the Burnout and Need for Speed aesthetics. Anyone that has been in the countryside outside the main city in Paradise will be familiar with the look, but the inclusion of "real" cars is a notable change. **The LP 640 feels heavier than a typical Burnout car, and I feel a touch of understeer as we turn into the first bend, revealing a nod toward a more realistic handling model than the studio has typically implemented in the past.** "We're still working on the handling," Webster explains as the Reventón roars past with its police lights flashing. "People have certain expectations of us in that regard. This isn't going to be a hardcore simulation. We don't play games like that, and we don't make games like that. Need for Speed: Shift was very sim-like, and while we loved it, it would be impossible to play Hot Pursuit with a model like that, though. Being chased by cops at 200 mph with that handling model would be impossible."

"We've gone for a setup that's close to Burnout and close to Most Wanted with a teeny bit of realism in there," Sullivan says. "It's a very different place for us to be. That said, though, we want to be able to drive these cars—these *f***ing gorgeous cars*—the way that we *dream* we could. In real life these things are difficult to drive, but we don't want to make you play like that. We're taking the *spirit* of each car and letting you play *that*. Within 30 or 40 seconds with each car, you should be able to feel good about it. We want you to be comfortable drifting a Lambo as soon as you try it."

"The escalation of the chase in Most Wanted was something that we really pulled ideas from," Sullivan explains as the two cars on the screens in front of us dart past each other. "So we looked at how that would work if the cop player could activate these things like 'weapons' when the heat level is at a sufficient level." Hot Pursuit's cops possess four different tools at their disposal, each mapped to a button on the directional pad. They can

drop spike strips, call in a road block, request air support (from helicopters that track their targets and drop spike strips to halt them), and fire an EMP gun that reverses their target's controls. Each weapon charges as the intensity of the chase escalates. "The guy being chased has very different priorities," Sullivan explains. "The real goal for him is running and hiding, so we have four completely different tools there: a cloaking device, a decoy, a nitrous boost, and a thing we're calling 'overdrive,' which is like a supernitrous." All of these "weapons" are deeply tied to the experience as it unfolds. "There are no pick-ups," Webster says. "We're not making Mario Kart. Everything will completely unlock within a 4-minute chase."

The action is fast, and it's brutal. In terms of pace, Hot Pursuit shares a lot with Burnout: Paradise, but the Most Wanted influence stands out. The music, particularly, is very reminiscent of Paradise. As the action intensifies, so too does the rhythmic mix of beats and orchestral samples that add to the tension. As we hurtle around the track, the mix of speed and gladiator-style chase "combat" certainly proves itself to be intoxicating—just as much as the "takedown" chases are in Paradise.

"We learned a lot coming off Paradise," Webster explains. "We saw that some people liked the direct online competition, but we also saw that a lot of people enjoyed the indirect competition, too. From the very beginning with Hot Pursuit, we wanted to focus on playing with friends. Not playing with strangers—specifically with *friends.* We'll integrate leaderboards and comparisons with buddy lists at every level with the game," he continues. "Whether it's collecting bounties when you're a cop or how many times you escape as a runner—*everything* will be tracked so we can let players see immediate comparisons with people they know."

"This is a connected generation of gamers now," Sullivan says. "Need for Speed hasn't properly entered the connected generation yet, and that's what we want Criterion to really bring to the table. The future of games is all about being able to play against your friends whether they're online at the same time as you or not. Comparison gameplay is very

important to what we're doing here, and to do that we collect every scrap of data we possibly can from each play session. Even in this simple game loop we're showing now, we're tracking escapes, busts, how many times you run off the road, how many spike strips you use... everything. All that behavior is tracked, and we can make little games and challenges out [of] this comparison play."

Like many developers today, the team at Criterion is increasingly aware of the demands placed upon the audience, particularly as players mature. People have less free time and more entertainment-based distractions available to them as technology advances. It's a theme that's clearly top-of-mind, and one that the new game carries at its very core.

"Honestly, as we all get older, it's hard enough arranging it for a bunch of mates to meet at the pub. So convincing them all to be online at the same time is even more of a nightmare," Webster chuckles. "The online space is a tough one to break into right now, especially when there are millions [of players] that are just focused on playing shooters and nothing else. But connected play is so *important*—I think there's more to it than jumping into a scheduled game together and shooting at each other. You don't necessarily need to be directly connected to make a good online experience.

"We started this stuff in Paradise with Road Rules and Showtime," Webster continues, describing the popular leaderboard-driven modes that saw players setting times on specific streets and racking up dollar-valued wrecks at specific intersections. "Those modes really helped inform what we're doing here, but then we also drew some inspiration from playing Call of Duty." What? "Yeah, well, not playing it in a hardcore way, obviously—but the way that you can play it with a small group of friends. My brother loves to play a specific map, and he *only* wants to play with me and a couple of friends. We all jump in together in a private game and just run around shooting at each other. We make our own fun with the tools that the game provides, and that kind of emergent gameplay is a really important part of what we want to capture with Hot Pursuit."

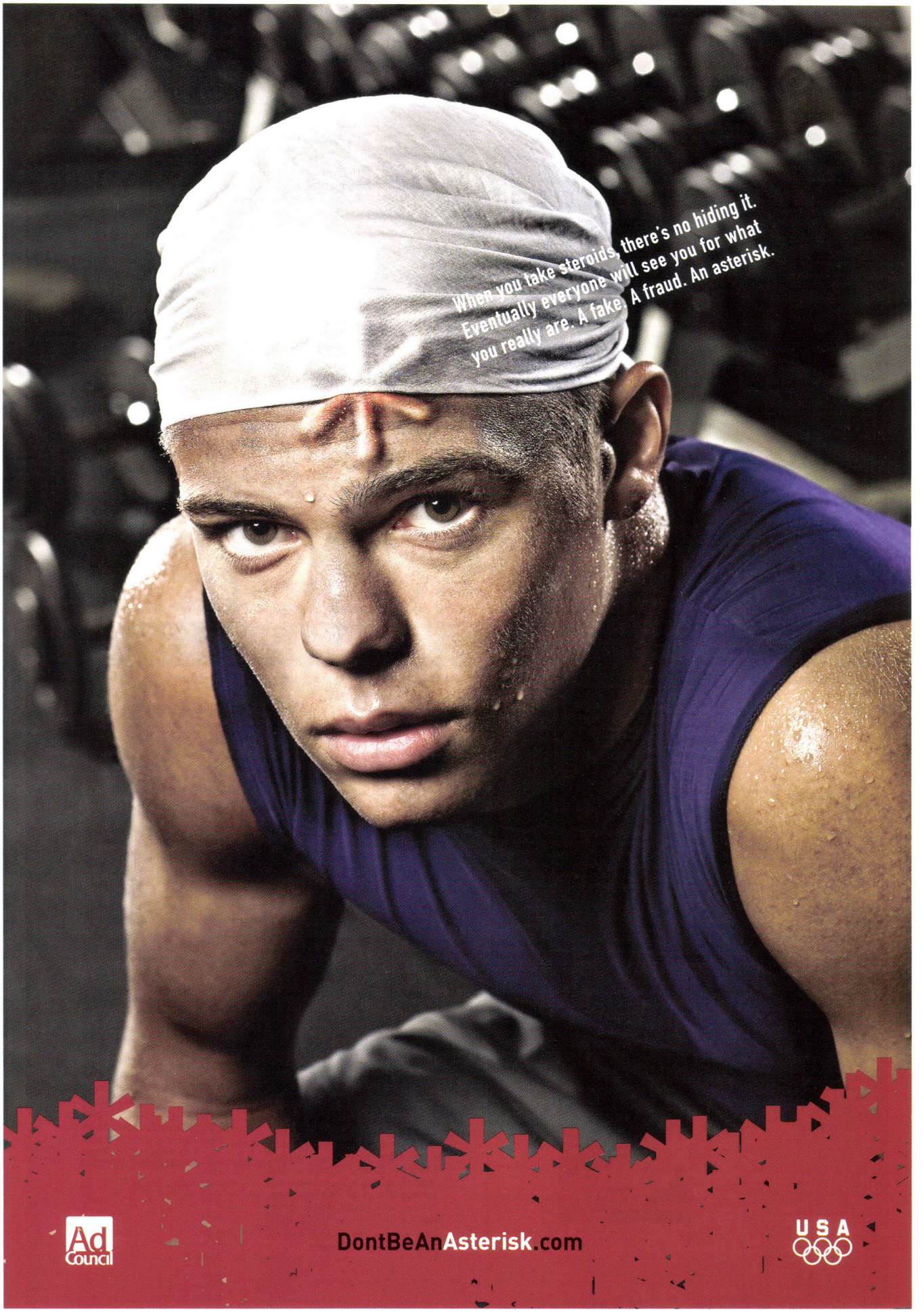
Based on our time with the game, Criterion certainly seems

to be on the right track. **As we joust, jostle, and battle as both the runner and the cop, it soon becomes very clear that the key to Hot Pursuit's success will be the freedom it affords players.** At first we play it just like we would Most Wanted—as a typical chase. But as the game's simple "rules" become evident, we find ways to joust and to run rings around each other before hurtling off down side roads and dirt tracks. The excitement first comes from the thrill of the chase—and then it comes from the shift in energy as the runner tries to hide from the cop.

"We're really not going to stick to any kind of old-fashioned gameplay design or thinking," Sullivan enthuses. "It's important that this game be as flexible as possible. It'll support any mix of cops and racers for eight players at once. You can have seven cops chasing one racer if you want, or vice versa. The key is to make it so that people can play the way *they* want to. Obviously, we'll put in a bunch of objectives for the single-player game, but what we really want to impress upon people is that Hot Pursuit is a *connected* game."

The pair promises that this *isn't* an indication of dumbing down the new game or reducing in scale; it's about optimizing the game for the way an increasing number of people now choose to play. "I don't mean to be cheesy or weird when I say this," Sullivan concludes, "but Hot Pursuit is really a reflection of who we are as players at this point in time." In the past few years, all genres of games have evolved somewhat, but it's arguable that racing games have changed very little with the exception of improvements to graphics and physics models.

Even titles like Burnout: Paradise and the recently released Split/Second, which switches up the rules by introducing more chase-like gameplay, still predominantly adhere to either single-player racing events with specific objectives or multiplayer challenges with similar goals. That Hot Pursuit has connectivity and emergent gameplay concepts baked into its DNA is deeply significant, and this certainly demonstrates a huge amount of potential—and a possible turning point for the driving genre as a whole.


When you take steroids, there's no hiding it.
Eventually everyone will see you for what
you really are. A fake. A fraud. An asterisk.
Ad Council
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Need for Speed: High Stakes (1999)
After the third game, EA dropped the numbering for NFS games. High Stakes (known as Road Challenge in Europe and Brazil) introduced a number of firsts for the series—vehicle damage and a customization system that was tied to the in-game currency. It is also the first title to feature 3D modeled car interiors. High Stakes features five different A.I. opponents: Nemesis, Bullit, Frost, Ranger, and Chump.

Need for Speed II (1997)
The second Need for Speed is one of the first game titles to ever "stream" data from a CD-ROM to provide richer and more detailed environments modeled on areas of North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. It also features an extensive selection of licensed vehicles, including the Jaguar XJ220, the McLaren F1, and even the incredibly rare Ford Indigo concept.

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2 (2002)
The first Need for Speed designed for PlayStation 2 is widely regarded by many as one of the best in the series. It draws much of its inspiration from the original Hot Pursuit and places the bulk of its gameplay emphasis on evading cops and finding short cuts through the large tracks. Hot Pursuit 2 features several firsts for the series: The noted Black Box studio developed it; it ditches the in-cockpit view (instead opting for the now-familiar bumper cam); and it includes licensed music.

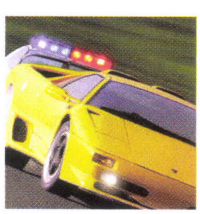
Need for Speed: Underground (2003)
Widely regarded as the beginning of the "second phase" in the life of the franchise, Underground is a complete reimagining of the series' formula, with a shift in emphasis away from racing exotics to illegal street racing. Inspired by the movie *The Fast and the Furious*, it focuses on the import tuner scene and includes cars from Mitsubishi, Toyota, and Subaru. Reflective of the culture, it features an extensive modification system. The game is also notable for its incredible representation of speed. This is thanks to the involvement of noted visual effects specialist Habib Zargarpour, whose previous work includes the films *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace*, *Twister*, and *The Bourne Identity*.

Burnout (2001)
Criterion's first Burnout game was released for PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube by Acclaim, and it was widely praised for its focus on exceptionally high-speed races and excellent presentation. Players and critics alike lauded the game for its extremely challenging gameplay, noting that it was so difficult that it was even possible to run out of time when in first place. Fortunately, the game sold well enough for Criterion to work on a sequel.

1994

The Need for Speed (1994)
Electronic Arts partnered with *Road & Track* magazine to produce the first Need for Speed game for the $700 3DO game platform in 1994 and later for the PlayStation, Sega Saturn, and PC. The game features eight licensed cars: a blue Lamborghini Diablo, a red Ferrari 512 TR, a blue Dodge Viper RT/10, a green Corvette ZR1, a blue Porsche 911, a red Toyota Supra Turbo, a silver Acura NSX, a yellow Mazda RX-7, and a hidden fantasy car called the Warrior. Note for trivia buffs: The entire game fit into a just 1MB of RAM.

Need for Speed III: Hot Pursuit (1998)
Just a year after the second title in the series, EA introduced police chases and (very limited) online multiplayer modes to the highly regarded Hot Pursuit. Some of the new modes go on to form the fundamental structure of all Need for Speed games. Hot Pursuit is the first NFS to include a full career mode as well as a "high stakes" mode that is essentially a variation on the real-world idea of racing for pink slips.



Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed (2000)
While single-make racing games existed before Porsche Unleashed, EA's game raised the bar considerably by including over 50 years of vehicles from the storied marque. The game features a career mode dubbed "Evolution" that requires the player to win races in order to unlock vehicles in chronological order. Another fact for trivia buffs: This is the first Need for Speed that doesn't feature a split-screen multiplayer mode.

Burnout 2: Point of Impact (2002)
The second Burnout game introduces the idea of accumulating "boost" by driving as dangerously as possible. Driving on the wrong side of the road, narrowly missing traffic, and jumping off ramps helps charge up your car and allowed it to go even faster. Burnout 2 is also the first in the series to introduce the popular Crash Mode, where players earn points by causing damage to other vehicles and creating massive pileups. The game also features a police mode, where players must wreck a bad guy's car in order to unlock it—a concept that lives on in Criterion's Hot Pursuit.

Need for Speed: Underground 2 (2004)
This game continues the narrative concept introduced in the previous title. Underground 2 features even more car modifications than before, and it introduces an open-world playing environment rather than sequential circuits and point-to-point races. Fans of attractive ladies were pleased to note the inclusion of Brooke Burke in the cast.

Burnout 3: Takedown (2004)
Takedown arrived for the PS2 and Xbox in 2004. It expands on the previous Burnout with two different race modes and three crash modes. The game features 173 different events to race in and 67 cars that players could unlock, including fire trucks and trash trucks that you could use to devastating effect in Crash Mode.

Need for Speed: Carbon (2006)
Carbon takes the series back to something more akin to the structure of Underground 2, but it introduces fully deformable car geometry in the shape of a system dubbed "autosculpt." Players could add aftermarket body kit parts to their cars and then mold them into new (often very ugly) shapes. Carbon continues the series' new-found love of video-based cut-scenes with the inclusion of Emmanuelle Vaugier (*Two and a Half Men*) as the player's partner. Carbon is the first Need for Speed for both the Xbox 360 *and* PlayStation 3.

Need for Speed: Most Wanted (2005)
In retrospect, Most Wanted is arguably the best game in the NFS series, though it only managed to scratch up a Metacritic score of 83 when it came out in 2005. It is the first Need for Speed for the Xbox 360, and it has since become the biggest-selling NFS title ever, moving more than 16 million copies across all platforms. That makes it one of the most-successful video-game releases of all time. The game blends the open-world freedom of Underground 2 with many of the gameplay attributes in Hot Pursuit 2.

Need for Speed Undercover (2008)
The worst-reviewed Need for Speed title in the franchise's 14 years to date, Undercover is an ambitious mess that leans far too hard on its story-driven, "Hollywood" production values and less on its gameplay. Released on seven different platforms, it failed to achieve a Metacritic average score of more than 65 on any system and caused many fans to question whether the series had come to the end of its run.

Need for Speed: Shift (2009)
It's remarkable how EA put the franchise completely back on track in the space of just a year. Need for Speed: Shift marks a move in a completely new direction for the series, putting it up against the likes of more realistic racing fare like Forza Motorsport and Project Gotham Racing. With the release of Shift, EA announced that the brand had achieved lifetime sales of over 100 million units, an achievement that only four other video-game series have matched.

Need for Speed: Nitro (2009)
Released just after Shift, Nitro is a Wii- and DS-specific title that focuses far more on arcade-style racing experiences with fantasy cars and crazy, completely unrealistic scenarios. Nitro was released at the beginning of EA's move to make more Wii-specific offerings due to the popularity of Nintendo's console, but it failed to capture the imaginations of gamers or critics. It achieved a Metacritic average score of just 69.

Need for Speed: World (2010)
Designed as a free-to-play PC-only MMO racing game, Need for Speed World is set for launch late this year. The game draws on challenges and environments from previous Need for Speed games (initially Most Wanted and Carbon, but the cities and tracks from other titles are promised as later updates) and bolts them together in a vast online world.

2010

Burnout: Revenge (2005)
The PS2 and Xbox versions of Revenge came out in 2005, with an Xbox 360 edition following in early 2006. Revenge introduces "traffic checking" (ramming traffic as you speed past cars going in the same direction) and "vertical takedowns," which involve landing on top of opponents' cars. As with Burnout 3 before it, the Crash Modes were incredibly popular in Revenge. Objectives are set up like elaborate automotive pinball challenges.

Burnout: Paradise (2008)
Criterion's Burnout Paradise takes the notion of open-world racing and completely expands it by offering a huge environment (the titular Paradise City) to explore, filled with events that borrow gameplay concepts from all of the previous Burnouts. Unlike most racing games, which offer online multiplayer modes that require players to be online at the same time, Paradise puts a strong emphasis on the idea of a persistent online world where players could set "records" on particular stretches of road and then compare stats with friends on their buddy list. In an unprecedented move, Criterion followed the release of Paradise with a "year of Paradise," in which it supported the game with regular releases of downloadable content, enhancements, and new vehicles.

Need for Speed: ProStreet (2007)
After several years of celebrating the illicit street racing scene, ProStreet blends the fundamentals of the games that came before it; while it focuses on tuner culture, it drops players into a professional-style racing event at real-world tracks like Infineon Raceway, Willow Springs Raceway, Texas International Speedway, Mondello Park International Racing Circuit, and Autopolis. It is the first Need for Speed to include realistic procedural damage (that crumples cars dynamically upon impact), and it pioneers the realistic smoke effects that later appear in numerous EA games.

NEED FOR SPEED //// CRITERION TIMELINE

With the impending release of Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit, two well-loved and storied franchises (Need for Speed and Burnout) blend into one product that distills many of the best qualities and innovations of each. What follows is a timeline of all of the Need for Speed games released since the original in 1994, along with all of the Criterion-developed Burnout games, to illustrate the evolution of the two over the years. From this you can see where inspiration helped drive major innovations for each series and how their fates have intertwined over the years despite being pitched against each other as competitors.

Re-views

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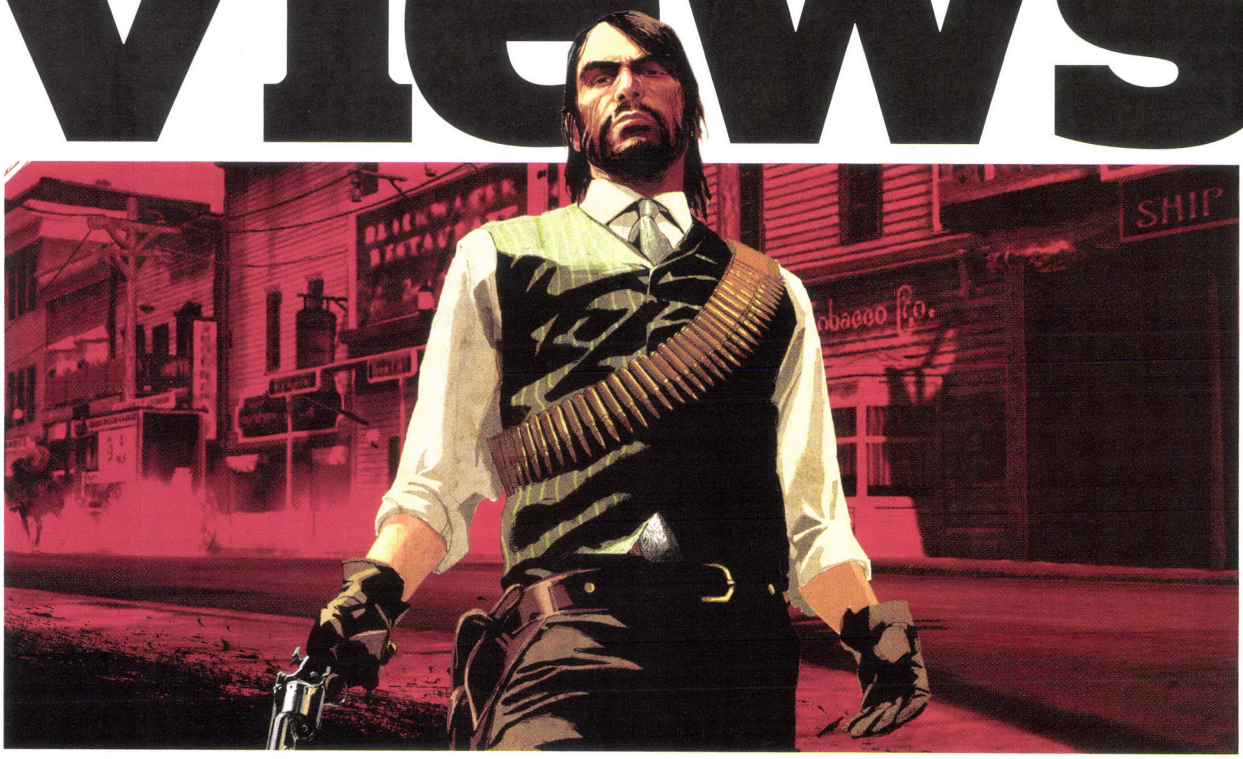

Red Dead Redemption

Rockstar rustles up a stellar open-world experience with this spiritual successor to 2004's Red Dead Revolver.

PlayStation 3, Xbox 360

- **Developer: Rockstar San Diego**
- **Publisher: Rockstar**
- **ESRB: M**

★ GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE ★

In the 15 hours it took me to clear Red Dead Redemption's expansive core campaign, the thing I found myself most surprised by was how consistently likable rough-and-tumble protagonist John Marston remained throughout the game. He's a stark contrast to Red Harlow, the star of 2004's Red Dead Revolver; Rockstar built that character in the mold of Clint Eastwood's "Man With No Name," and Harlow rarely spouted an unnecessary syllable. Marston, on the other hand, has more in common with *Unforgiven's* tragic hero, Bill Munny: He's a family man unceremoniously thrust back into a past life he can't leave behind. He's one of a dying breed of sunset riders facing extinction and doomed to go out in a hail of gunfire.

From the start of Redemption's bullet-riddled narrative, Marston operates from the familiar gray moral zone native to all of Rockstar's leading men. Forced to confront his past in order to save his future, Marston's sweeping transition from bounty hunter to unlikely freedom fighter to, finally, grizzled relic in an endangered era makes for a captivating arc and paints Marston as one of the more sympathetic antiheroes in recent memory. Marston's confrontation with an America that doesn't want nor need him brings to mind Grand Theft Auto IV's Niko Bellic, but his desire to find a peaceful place for himself and his family makes Redemption's yarn something familiar yet unique in video games. It kept me earnestly interested in the jaded cowboy's quest for restitution long past the main story's conclusion.

In typical Rockstar fashion, Redemption supplies a motley crew of liars, outlaws, substance abusers, and would-be revolutionaries; each is a riff on classic spaghetti Western tropes, but they're well rounded and interesting enough that they never feel contrived. Portrayed with cinematic precision, these saints

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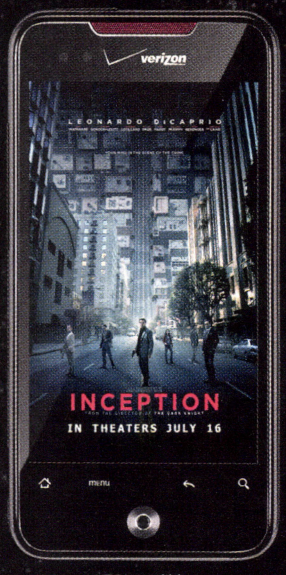

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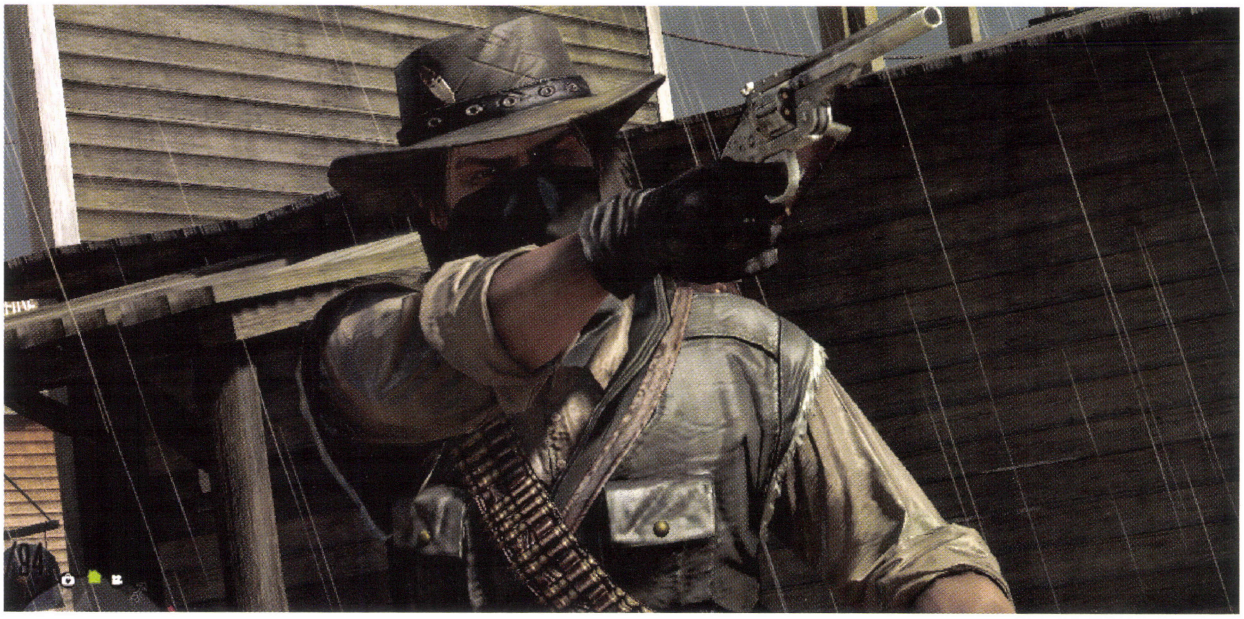


John Marston can purchase a bandana to mask his identity and maintain his Honor before partaking in less-than-noble endeavors.

and sinners breathe life into Redemption's vast landscapes. They're also excellent counterpoints to Marston's lone-wolf persona, serving as memorable foils and friends in the process. And even though Marston's salvation frequently takes a backseat to the varied quandaries of these frontiersmen (and women), they're engaging enough to make players *want* to see their stories through to their just end.

As diverse and memorable as Redemption's cast is, it's the expansive open-world of New Austin that lifts the experience well above the latest crop of open-world sandboxes; it's also the main reason why the "Grand Theft Cowpoke" comparisons are both irrelevant and inadequate. Swapping cars for horses and skyscrapers for open ranges, Redemption's frontier landscape effortlessly evolves from dusty plain to painted desert and back again, with all manner of rustlers, bandits, ranchers, and a menagerie of region-specific fauna breathing life into the land. I often passed on the option to quick-travel from camp or ride in a stagecoach taxi in favor of heading out on a trusty steed, as the genuine thrill of clopping through Redemption's rich scenery offers as much promise as the youthful portrait of America that it paints. From ad hoc hunting sessions to playing judge, jury, and oftentimes executioner to any number of randomly generated disputes, the wild frontier has a lot to discover and do. It helps that Red Dead Redemption is, by all measures, Rockstar's best-looking game; the masterfully crafted and stunningly detailed environments are beautiful to look at, and thankfully, they don't share Liberty City's brown, muddy "realism" filter.

But what makes the treks across Redemption's tumultuous terrain work so well is undoubtedly the game's equine element. The expertly implemented horseback riding brings an indisputable facet of authenticity to the title on par with so many silver-screen serials and dime-store novels. It's from atop horseback that players spend the majority of Marston's journey, and the satisfaction that comes with mastering a mount is well worth the strife that might come with first climbing into the saddle. Shooting while riding, for instance, or heading up your first cattle drive may take some practice, but the genuine thrill that these iconic activities offer make them both worthwhile and satisfying when they finally "click."

Of course, it's a Rockstar title, and Redemption doesn't completely stray from the company formula. While it strives to create its own legend, it still adheres to the open-world mission structure pioneered by Grand Theft Auto, with assorted letter-based waypoints serving as launch pads for any variety of optional and plot-progressing missions. These run the gamut from Rockstar staples like racing and playing cabby to more period-specific assignments like horse-breaking, saloon shootouts, or riding with a posse on any number of ambushes. Gamers who have qualms with GTA's reliance on secondary fetch missions will likely take issue with Marston's recurring role of errand boy, but the sheer quality and unpredictable nature of the tasks at hand—not to mention the much needed inclusion of midmission checkpoints—helps make these side missions a rewarding diversion.

Redemption's postmission Honor system is also worth noting: Unlike GTA, which assumes you'd play as a sociopath, Redemption allows society to recognize Marston as either a respected law-abiding peacemaker or dreaded saint of killers. I chose the virtuous path for my initial playthrough and used my reputation as an upstanding lawman to claim hefty store discounts and, on more than one occasion, get away with murder. The nature in which New Austin's denizens interact with you as your percentage statistics tick higher only serves to complement the in-depth world Rockstar has created, and while an occasional, "Well, if it isn't *the* John Marston!" won't single-handedly make Redemption a game-of-the-year contender, it's a nice

Rockstar implemented the horseback riding masterfully, and this only serves to further the iconic essence of the Wild West that seeps through Red Dead Redemption.

feature, one of several that makes Red Dead Redemption's love letter to the Wild West well worth revisiting.

One of Redemption's most notable aspects, and likely one of my favorite features, is the game's superb audio design. Every boot step, quick draw, hoof clop, and gunshot drips with Wild West authenticity, capturing the iconic essence of the lone outlaw in an unforgiving environment to a whip-cracking tee. Redemption's soundtrack, skillfully composed by musicians Bill Elm and Woody Jackson, admirably channels Ennio Morricone's work on Segio Leone's classic *Dollars* trilogy, with finely assembled whistles, harmonicas, and trumpets subtly commanding the game's onscreen action.

I was able to spend a considerable amount of time online with Redemption's beefy multiplayer component as well, and I can safely say that the potential for plenty of moonshine-swilling nights of deathmatch debauchery is most certainly there. Redemption's online modes offer up a few variations on traditional multiplayer staples, with Shootout and Gang Shootout subbing for Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch, and the gold-fueled Grab the Bag, Gold Rush, and Hold Your Own acting as alternatives to Capture the Flag. From the initial Mexican Standoff to the last lingering gunshot, Redemption's multiplayer works remarkably well and only serves to complement—and build on—the title's exquisite single-player campaign.

I don't feel, however, that I can give a solid thumbs-up or thumbs-down to Redemption's most ambitious multiplayer feature: the Free Roam "lobbies." Offering up the entire open-world of New Austin to 16 players for posse-forming, gang-conquering action is a brilliant concept, but it's really up to the players to make the most of it. Still, the multiplayer modes offer a lot of meat for gamers to feast on, and it's actually Rockstar's finest effort to open their worlds to online exploration to date.

It shouldn't surprise anyone that Red Dead Redemption is such a terrific title. Rockstar is one of the most creative and talented developers in the industry, and their commitment to excellence shows in each and every product. Although many say this about nearly every new Rockstar title, Red Dead Redemption is arguably their best effort to date, if only because it distills all of the lessons they've learned from their previous titles into an engaging, expansive, and enthralling world. But the best part of Rockstar's open-world "oater" is its honest and open appreciation for the iconic Western genre; its Wild West setting is memorable and stays true to established genre lore while still managing to add its own wrinkles and twists. It's one of the most appealing game worlds I've experienced, and it holds enough thrills to keep you playing from the very first bullet to long after the ride off into the sunset.—***Will Herring***

"Although many say this about nearly every new Rockstar title, Red Dead Redemption is arguably their best effort to date, if only because it distills all of the lessons they've learned from their previous titles into an engaging, expansive, and enthralling world."

★★★★★

PROS: Enormous, engaging world of New Austin; expertly captures the look and feel of the Wild West; likable protagonist John Marston has an interesting, worthwhile narrative.

CONS: Errand missions can get a bit tiring; occasional pop-in.

Mega Man Zero Collection

Mega Man's sidekick stars in this flawed compilation of past titles.

DS

- **Developer: Inti Creates**
- **Publisher: Capcom**
- **ESRB: E**

It's a bit shocking that developer Inti Creates recaptured the special magic of Mega Man in their recent 8-bit-style entries. During their decade-long stewardship of the Mega Man series, they've more often indulged in all of the design choices that drove mainstream gamers *away* from the Blue Bomber rather than showcase the dynamic simplicity of the series' classics. The four games that compose the Mega Man Zero series, released annually from 2002 to 2005, exemplify these bad habits. They are action-platformers in the classic Mega Man mold, smothered by poorly developed adventure elements and collect-athon/critter-raising play clearly inspired by the turn-of-the-century Pokémon craze. The series is also steeped in continuity reaching back to the 1987 original through the Mega Man X series. That Capcom's releasing this collection now is strange; Mega Man Zero is everything recent retro throwbacks Mega Man 9 and 10 are not.

Throughout Zero Collection, players take control of Zero, the legendary Maverick Hunter who played Han Solo to X's Luke Skywalker in Mega Man X. The first Zero opens 100 years after Mega Man X 8. A human and reploid resistance searches for a deactivated, amnesic Zero. The resistance is fighting Copy X, a despotic clone of X. Copy X and his reploid army rule Neo Arcadia, the last bastion of human civilization after the Cyber Elf war.

Right. The story, as you can gather from the jargon, is a bit dense.

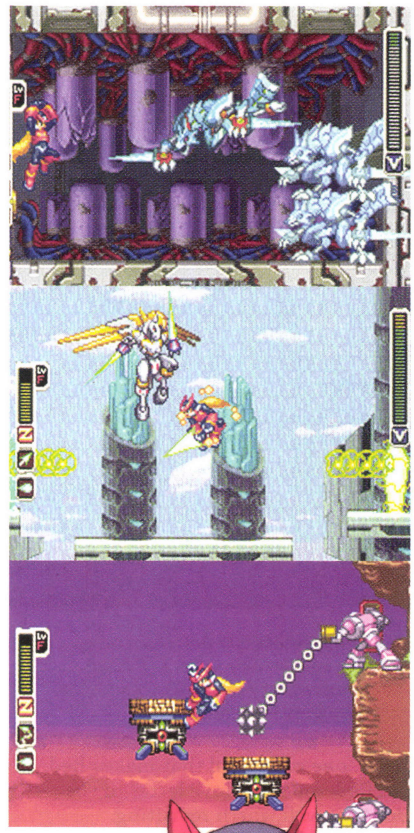
It's important to note all of this, as it sets up the series' core mechanic and chief failing: the Cyber Elf system, Mega Man Zero's answer to Pokémon. It works like this: Cyber Elves are collectible, cherub-faced items you can find throughout the game. Each one boosts Zero's stats or aids in battle—some are permanent, and others are single use. You have to "raise" many of them using E-crystals, a currency that enemies drop. The Cyber Elf system varies significantly throughout the four games; it's at its most cumbersome in the first and streamlined by the fourth. Cyber Elves drag down the action thanks to their random appearance (Zero 1) and the hub-level, talk-to-everyone adventuring and exploration (Zero 2-4) required to catch 'em all.

The action varies throughout as well. Each successive entry in the series introduces new armor upgrade systems and weapons. You earn suits of armor and wield a whip in Zero 3; players discover specific body-part upgrades and brandish *tonfas* in Zero 3; and Zero 4 features collectible components you use to build upgrades. As with the Cyber Elf system, these features overcomplicate games that should be about jumping on platforms and blowing up robots—a classic Mega Man staple that ultimately serves as the collection's triumph. While the DS cart features a few throwaway extras, like a wallpaper gallery and a strange assortment of cheats that only affect Zero 3, its big addition is Easy Scenario, which allows you to play straight through the series with all of the Cyber Elves and most of the major upgrades unlocked from the start. While it makes the games a cakewalk for Mega Man veterans, it allows players to appreciate Zero 1-4 as pure action games. That the collection allows us to revisit the series free of its excesses makes it well worth your time.—***John Constantine***

★★★

PROS: New Easy Scenario; classic platforming and shooting; killer soundtrack; awesome sprites.

CONS: Light on extras; limited control customization; Cyber Elves; poor adventuring sequences.



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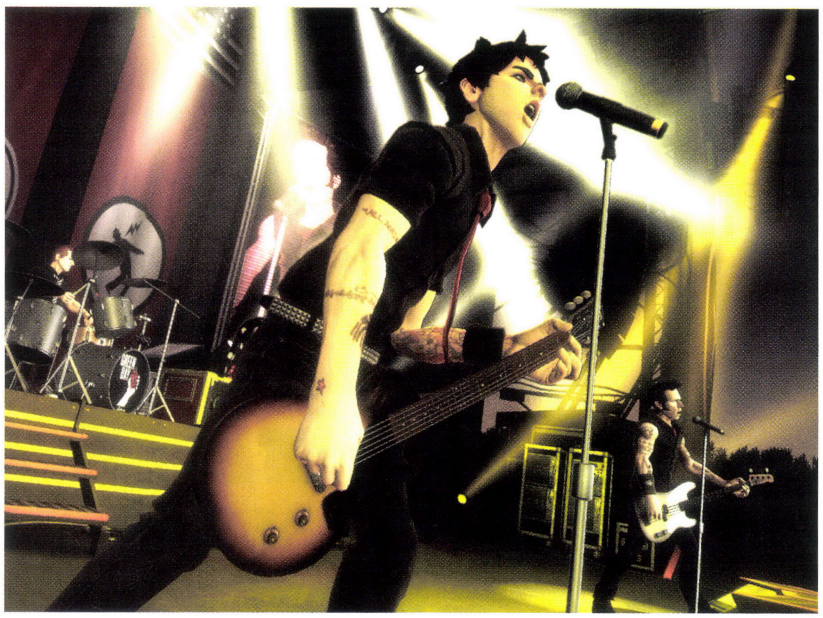
Green Day: Rock Band

Harmonix hits the highest of high notes with this unlikely hit.

PlayStation 3, Xbox 360

- **Developer: Harmonix**
- **Publisher: MTV Games**
- **ESRB: T**



Eagle-eyed fans should recognize the Milton Keynes venue and its pyrotechnic wizardry from the Bullet in a Bible *set.*

Even as a lifelong fan of the band, the existence of Green Day: Rock Band initially confused me. Punk rock is notoriously repetitive, and Billie Joe Armstrong, while a popular front man, doesn't possess the same star power as John, Paul, George, or Ringo.

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

The Beatles deserved their own Rock Band title because *everyone* is familiar with their music, which goes a long way toward making the game accessible. I played The Beatles: Rock Band with my *mom*, which says a lot.

But I was wrong to assume Green Day didn't carry a comparable amount of cultural cachet as the Fab Four, and it only took one song for me to "get" why Green Day: Rock Band makes sense. As soon as Mike Dirnt's groovy bass line in "She" exploded into its aggressive chorus, I saw that Green Day is a better fit for Rock Band than any band I can think of, *including* The Beatles. That's not to say that this is a better Rock Band game or that Green Day is a better musical act; my point is that the balls-out *rocking* of Green Day's music is a much better fit for the medium.

A huge part of this stems from the excellent re-creation of Green Day's energetic live shows. I saw the band play years ago, and it's still, hands down, the best concert I've ever been to. The performance has a peerless enthusiasm, and the goal isn't just to entertain the audience but to include them as well. In Green Day: Rock Band you see the band throw choruses to the crowd and induce rhythmic clapping and cult-like chanting. This authentic replication of the actual stage experience resonated with me more vividly than any other Rock Band experience I've had thus far. I had a blast with the rapid-fire guitar riffs, mellowed out to the catchy and melodic bass lines, belted out harmonizing vocals, and went ballistic on the drums.

What's strange is that Green Day: Rock Band's career mode is also the weakest of the series. It doesn't offer the personal progression of core Rock Band games, and it isn't as much of a personal experience as The Beatles' trip through time. Unlockable photos and video clips don't cut it for me, unfortunately, but the focus is more on presentation than progression, so I got over that hump pretty quick. I do wish the game had more tracks from *Warning*, *Nimrod*, and *Insomniac*—those albums are represented by a meager couple cuts each—but the rest of the track list includes most of the band's top hits.

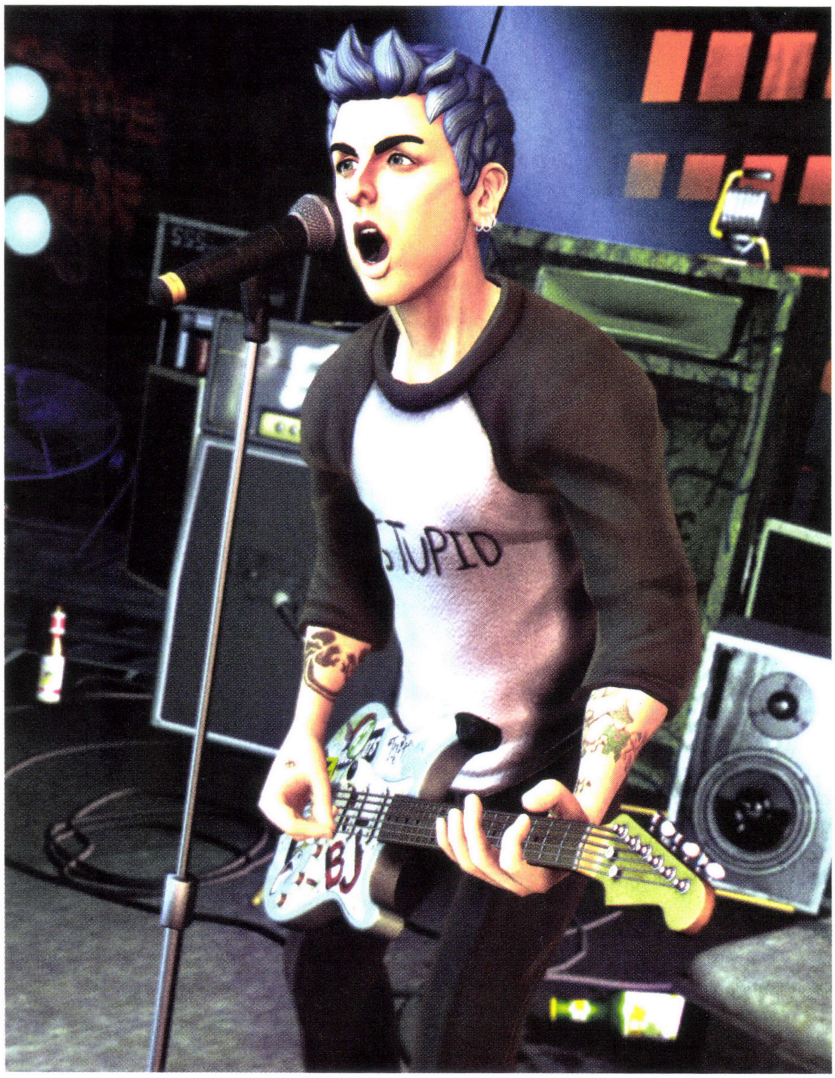
After gaining a clearer understanding and deeper appreciation of Green Day's songwriting prowess, I also realize that my fear of repetition was unwarranted. Songs such as "F.O.D." and "Burnout" have musical variety beyond predictable power chords. This is especially true in *American Idiot*, where 10-minute-long epics like "Homecoming" and "Jesus of Suburbia" metamorphose a half-dozen times in the same song. I dig that on-the-fly change of pace, and it seems Harmonix does, too: The developer cleverly combined certain songs into one track, so a track like "Give Me Novocaine/She's a Rebel" has you playing both songs as one, back to back.

The tendency toward newer tracks, and the neglect of excellent older ones, is a bit disappointing, but as a whole, Green Day: Rock Band plays like a big, wet kiss for its fans. I expect those who don't care for Green Day to enjoy this one as well, not only because they probably know the hits even if they don't enjoy the band, but because the songs are a perfect fit for the Rock Band experience. This isn't a case of just adding Green Day to Rock Band and calling it a day: Rather, Harmonix took the time to marry a band's existing catalog to its sublime gaming experience, resulting in an immensely enjoyable experience that has far more appeal than you or I originally thought.—***Mitch Dyer***

★★★★½

PROS: The great mix of aggressive punk rock and mellow acoustic jams play great on every instrument; presentation brilliantly captures the enthusiasm and energy of Green Day live.

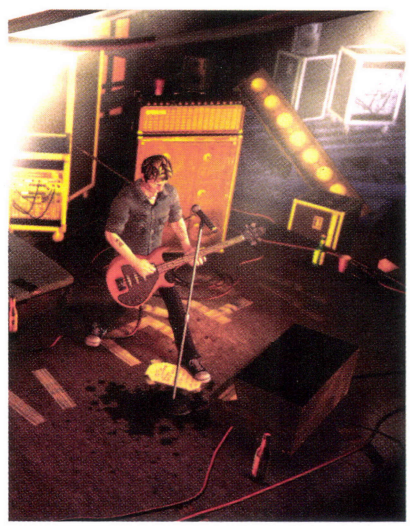
CONS: Shallow career mode isn't terribly rewarding; older albums get the cold shoulder.



My Friend Kevin

As an experiment, I asked my buddy Kevin to play some Green Day: Rock Band with me. Kevin loves Rock Band to death, but he strongly dislikes Green Day. "There are only a few songs I like, mostly their older stuff," he says. "All of their new stuff is overplayed garbage." He enjoyed most of Green Day's major-label debut, *Dookie* (arguably their best record), but the rest of the game didn't sit too well with him. He liked that it was Rock Band, and let's be honest, we can all tolerate plenty of awful songs featured in both Rock Band and Guitar Hero because of the gaming experience—A.F.I.'s "Miss Murder" and Fallout Boy's "Dead on Arrival," for instance. But Kevin just couldn't get over that it was all Green Day, all of the time. "As a Rock Band game, it's fine," he says. "There just aren't many songs I want to play."

Consider this a case of buyer beware: If you love Green Day and Rock Band, this one's a no-brainer. And if you love Green Day but have little to no experience with rhythm games, move out of the cave you live in and check it out—it won't disappoint you. But if you absolutely can't stand Green Day's music, then you should obviously look for your rhythm-game fix somewhere else. Coincidentally, my mom liked Green Day: Rock Band a lot, even though she's not in the target demographic, so take that for what it's worth.



Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands

The Prince rewinds time and returns to his roots.

PlayStation 3, Xbox 360

- **Developer: Ubisoft**
- **Publisher: Ubisoft**
- **ESRB: T**

Some of the battle sequences call to mind the classic special effects of films like The 7th Voyage of Sinbad, *albeit without the stop-motion feel.*

I've enjoyed all of the games in the Prince of Persia franchise, but I feel like the series has traveled down a slippery slope since 2003's imaginative reboot, The Sands of Time. Ubisoft took a big step backward with Warrior Within, a combat-heavy title that's unnecessarily "extreme," partly righted the ship with The Two Thrones, only to dig the hole deeper with 2008's self-titled reboot.

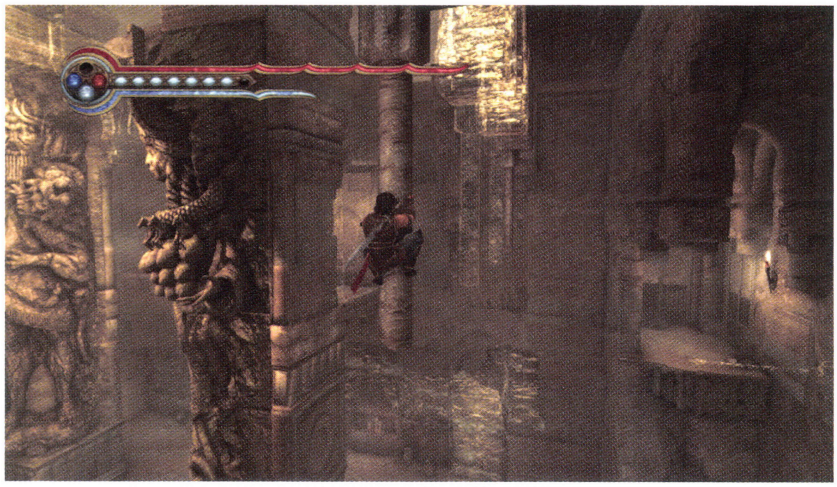
GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

Luckily for us, the Prince went through at least one harrowing ordeal during the 7 years between the end of Sands of Time and the beginning of Warrior Within, and this serves as the basis for The Forgotten Sands. This might make the title sound like a "Lost Levels"-style expansion pack, but it stands on its own as complete tale. The Prince is set to train to become a great leader, but instead the supernatural power of the Sands of Time threatens the Earth once more.

The first—and best—thing I noticed about The Forgotten Sands is that it brings back the power to turn back the clock, something the '08 reboot I mentioned steals from you. I was so glad to see its return that I cheered out loud. Nailed by an enormous swinging ax, or shredded by a spinning spiked pole? That's easy to fix: Erase and rewrite your recent history by tapping or holding the left bumper. You don't have complete control over when time starts flowing forward again, which can sometimes lead to a second round of rewinding, but the process is usually smooth enough to be satisfying.

The time-shifting mechanic is such an integral part of the franchise that it was strange to see it omitted in the last title. Journeying backward through time to undo a deadly mistake is not only an essential gameplay concept but an integral part of the series' fiction. It not only gives you a fighting chance against the devious environmental puzzles but also reminds you, as well as the Prince, of the value of tenacity and perseverance. But when Elika, your omnipresent companion in the reboot, swoops in to save you whenever you screw up, you feel as though you're under the unfailing protection of an interventionist god. That really robs you of the danger and consequences inherent in the game's action, so it's great that Ubisoft chose to bring time-shifting back in The Forgotten Sands.

Ubisoft also reworked the combat system combat system, ditching the



Ghostly images of missing architecture regain their substance, one at a time, with a tap of the Left Bumper.

1-on-1 battles that devolve into stale and repetitive quick-time events in favor of big, crowded fights involving dozens of enemies. Undead skeletal warriors wave swords in your face, shield-bearing foes shurg off sword swipes until you give them a well-placed kick, and bull-like beasties knock aside everything in their paths like running backs fighting for a crucial first down.

The controls are simple, with one button controlling your blade, limiting combinations to quick swipes and charged swings. You gain experience from almost every foe you put down. As you earn skill points, you unlock cool elemental attacks that imbue your slashes with the power of fire and ice, cover your skin in stony armor, and let you pound out a wave of windy destruction. In truth, your enemies take so long to wind up every attack that combat only feels like a challenge when you face a new boss. But you will feel like a bad-ass as you carve through the angry mob. If you like, you can even take a break to farm experience points from Time Trial mode, in which you attempt to defeat 250 foes in under 6 ½ minutes. The increasingly difficult waves of Enemy Tides mode lets you rake in piles of experience as well, but you have to finish the game first to unlock it.

Still, the most rewarding aspect of The Forgotten Sands lies in the free-running acrobatics that the Prince of Persia franchise helped popularize. Running along walls, clinging to columns, and swinging from conveniently placed poles is just as exhilarating and rewarding as it is in the Sands of Time. But don't think for one second that the game is just covering old ground: Over the course the game's 7-hour adventure, you gain access to powerful new abilities that open the door to awesome possibilities.

The most important of these gifts is dominion over water. Hold down the left trigger and, for a time, jets of water freeze into poles, spouts become solid columns, and flowing sheets crystallize into walls you can run up and jump between. Slowly but surely, the liquid puzzles become more difficult and require ever more meticulous timing. You might dive through a sheet of water, hold down the left trigger in time to freeze its neighbor so you might run up and jump off it, and time your release so you can soar back through the first without cracking your head open. It has countless variations on this theme, and each is both subtly demanding and surprisingly fulfilling.

> "The Forgotten Sands is more than just a return to form for a long-running franchise: it's also one of the most gratifying platforming epics to come along in ages."

Late in the game you also earn the ability to call back into existence pieces of the environment that crumbled long ago, but you can only do so with one chunk of architecture at a time. That means you need to call one piece of the world into existence in midair just as you sail off a piece that's about to disappear. You also mercilessly harass flapping black vultures to traverse open spaces—and tap the B button to fly short distances if an enemy target is nearby.

The Forgotten Sands gives each of these elements their fair share of time in the limelight and explores every aspect in great depth, but it's when they all mingle together toward the waning moments of the game that the most magical moments arise. When you're done clawing your way up a wonderfully intricate vertical labyrinth of water jets, phantom platforms, environmental dangers, feathery flutterers, and plain old traditional masonry, you'll feel like you've really accomplished something. This is the video-game equivalent of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, and yet, it remains accessible to all but the youngest audiences.

Of course,the game has some annoyances and imperfections. Some handholds are virtually invisible, and thus they require a leap of faith to ferret out. The button presses don't always register, and the Prince sometimes jumps out at a 45-degree angle to his death for no apparent reason. And let's face it—you're probably going to want to smack whoever designed a couple of the more irritating canned trap sequences, particularly when the spiked log swings really get going.

But none of these minor irritations comes close to diminishing the rich pleasure that defines so much of this bright and imaginative caper. The Forgotten Sands is more than just a return to form for a long-running franchise: It's also one of the most gratifying platforming epics to come along in ages.—***Cameron Lewis***

★★★★½

PROS: Friendlier tone; best climbing puzzles in the series; fun combat against plentiful opponents; easy on the eyes.
CONS: Some aggravating trap sequences; occasional minor control issues; most battles are remarkably easy.

Anatomy of an Interesting Gaming Novel

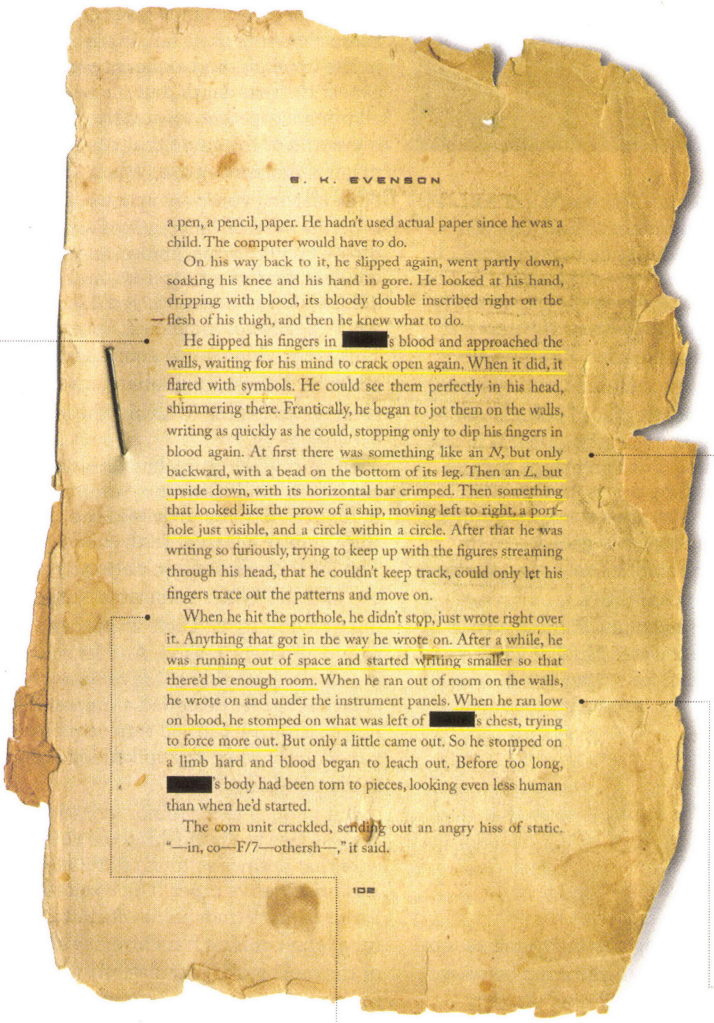
Dead Space: Martyr author B.K. Evenson explores one of the darkest scenes of his prequel novel.

People often deride novels based on video games as poor extensions of franchises, substituting overwrought descriptions of familiar scenes for interactivity. *Dead Space: Martyr* seeks to be the exception to the rule, as it focuses more on mood than mutations. "I became much more interested in the madness of the characters and the way the Marker was affecting them," author B.K. Evenson says. "That was much more interesting to me than the nature of the fact that you have to shoot off enemy limbs."

Evenson is certainly up to the task of tackling the fear and religious turmoil within Dead Space, as the award-winning writer is not only an avid game player but the creator of some of the most well-received horror novels of the last two decades. His first full-length work, *Altmann's Tongue*, caused his excommunication from the Mormon Church due to its violent content. His experience playing the first game and his knowledge of events of the second are also key, as Evenson is able to bridge the two games by presenting a different perspective of the world. "The way in which Dead Space 2 is set up makes you have to reinterpret what you knew in [the original] Dead Space," Evenson says. "My book really supports what's central to the Dead Space canon in both those games."

We asked Evenson to pick one of the most intense and gore-filled pages from *Martyr*, remove any spoiler-heavy material, and make note of how the events of this scene fall in line with the themes of the book and the franchise in general.

Dead Space: Martyr will be available starting July 20 at bookstores everywhere and at http://us.macmillan.com/deadspacemartyr.



B. K. EVENSON

a pen, a pencil, paper. He hadn't used actual paper since he was a child. The computer would have to do.

On his way back to it, he slipped again, went partly down, soaking his knee and his hand in gore. He looked at his hand, dripping with blood, its bloody double inscribed right on the flesh of his thigh, and then he knew what to do.

He dipped his fingers in [redacted]'s blood and approached the walls, waiting for his mind to crack open again. When it did, it flared with symbols. He could see them perfectly in his head, shimmering there. Frantically, he began to jot them on the walls, writing as quickly as he could, stopping only to dip his fingers in blood again. At first there was something like an *N*, but only backward, with a bead on the bottom of its leg. Then an *L*, but upside down, with its horizontal bar crimped. Then something that looked like the prow of a ship, moving left to right, a porthole just visible, and a circle within a circle. After that he was writing so furiously, trying to keep up with the figures streaming through his head, that he couldn't keep track, could only let his fingers trace out the patterns and move on.

When he hit the porthole, he didn't stop, just wrote right over it. Anything that got in the way he wrote on. After a while, he was running out of space and started writing smaller so that there'd be enough room. When he ran out of room on the walls, he wrote on and under the instrument panels. When he ran low on blood, he stomped on what was left of [redacted]'s chest, trying to force more out. But only a little came out. So he stomped on a limb hard and blood began to leach out. Before too long, [redacted]'s body had been torn to pieces, looking even less human than when he'd started.

The com unit crackled, sending out an angry hiss of static. "—in, co—F/7—othersh—," it said.

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TAKING NOTES

"This shows what happens when a mind has collapsed, shows how a human will respond when it starts being fed signals that it doesn't quite understand. There's a mania for recording and writing things down, which is both an attempt to record the information being given us and a form of psychosis. That's something you see in the game and movie versions of Dead Space as well."—**B.K. Evenson, _Dead Space: Martyr_ author**

INSIDE THE INSANITY

"In the game you occasionally find people banging their heads against walls or suddenly committing suicide for no explicable reason—it's a great part of the atmosphere. But in a book you have the added benefit of being able to see inside these people's heads, being able to understand how they're being changed, transformed. I tried to write something that was very dark and grim but still a great read."—**B.K. Evenson**

DECIPHERING THE DEAD

"There's one Easter Egg on this page: in the first bit of writing that he's described as doing, the weird characters he's writing are slightly distorted hand-drawn versions of the Dead Space alphabet and serve as a sort of code that can be correlated to the alphabet charts found in the Dead Space game."—**B.K. Evenson**

REPLAY VALUE

"You don't have to have played Dead Space to read the novel, but if you've played it in a serious way you'll find a few unexpected parallels (including very specific descriptions of killings) and inside jokes—little things you'll notice that other people won't catch."
—**B.K. Evenson**

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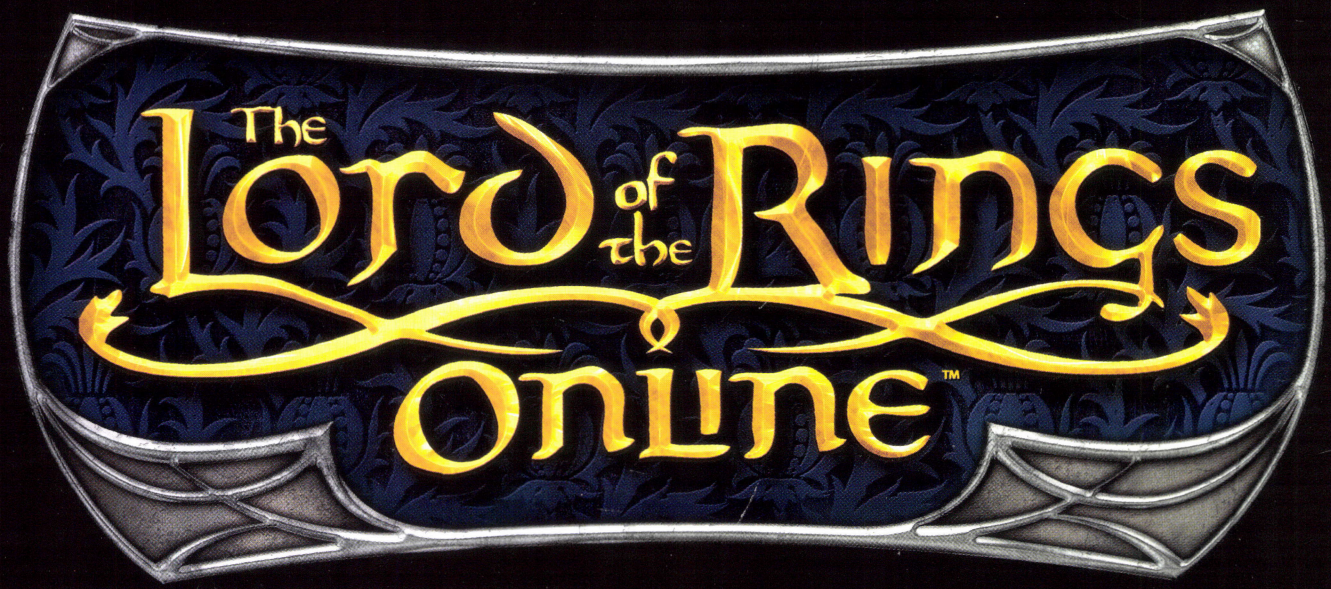

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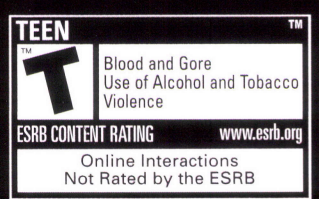

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